# My Lost Duchess

Jesse Lynch Williams

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## AN IDYL OF THE TOWN

BY

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# MY LOST DUCHESS

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## AN IDYL OF THE TOWN

### I

THERE is a beautiful girl in this town who has lately contracted an agreeable habit of making a triumphal tour up the crowded avenue past my window. She is rather tall, with a great amount of brownish hair, and wondrous eyes, which you might call starry, if that admits of a twinkle in them.

At times she drives, looking like a god-

dess in her cart,—no, not like a goddess in her cart at all; like a lovely woman in a modern, not to say extremely fashionable, victoria; and for my part I like this better. Imagine a rather heavy goddess trying to wear one of her hats!

Besides, goddesses would hardly manifest such a charmingly human interest in things and people that pass. Nor for that matter do many other humans of the sort termed fashionable; but this one never seems to be concerned with her clothes, her equipage or her fashionnobility. Indeed she does not seem to be aware of making triumphal tours.

She knows she 's a beauty though—they always do; but as she has the comfortable assurance that every one else acknowledges it too, she leans back in the cushions and lets go of herself, quite as if she were a philosophical old maid who had ceased to struggle.

More frequently she walks (I suppose you would call it walking), giving me a chance to look at close range, only the window-pane, the half-hidden privet hedge, and the granite balustrade between us. There is plenty of time to be critical when she walks. I have fine long, leisurely looks all the way from the right-hand frame of the window to the left. Ours are broad, generous windows.

When she drives, it is all over in a flashing second, and I have twenty-four hours to wait; sometimes even longer, for the habit is still in the forming. Indeed, I have yet to find one of them to be trusted implicitly. In times past, many, many of those I have grown fond of in the course of the trip across from one edge of the window to the other, dawned upon me but that once, or possibly twice, and never came near me again, though I loved them dearly for whole weeks at a time.

I wonder what has become of you all. Is it that you are afraid that I shall get over it if you let me see too much of you? She is not afraid.

## II

TO-DAY she swerved in quite near me, next to the balustrade, and before she reached the other frame of the window I had made numerous discoveries. I feel now that I know her quite intimately. The under lashes are also rather long, as under lashes go, and evenly distributed. I may say that it is a remarkable face, for it somehow sparkles.

Not seeing me she will never know how much I appreciate her, and I doubt if she would care. She coolly sweeps past with that light, strong stride of hers, as though it were the greatest fun to walk—and I suppose it must be when you do it that way—thinking the loveliest thoughts (which have nothing to do with me) and

yet taking such a charming interest, a gently humorous—I almost said a genial—interest in every one (except those in club windows), though looking all the while at something a million miles beyond the Avenue and me.

I trust I may never meet this girl. For she, no doubt, like all the rest who held out hope from time to time of being as I wanted them to be, would only prove another disappointment.

Yes, I shall stay here safely by my window, and thus keep her for my own for ever.

## III

t is the tenth day she has kept me waiting in this stogy chair missing my swim downstairs, making me late for dinner, and causing all sorts of inconvenience for many people. I had thought that I could trust her.

Possibly she resents my looking at her; I can't see why. What difference can it make to her, my sitting here liking her as the crowd goes by. Though I have tried, I can find no adequate excuse for her conduct, and suspect that she has been getting married or something of that sort.

There sits Torresdale in the opposite chair. He likes to read his paper here, and has an absurd notion that he owns my window. He is a literary man and

feels superior to all human emotions. What would Torresdale think of me if he knew why I hold the "Evening Post" so high between us every evening at this hour? . . .

A purple gloom has come over the Avenue, a deeper gloom is over me. The cabs have begun to show feeble yellow lamps: the long, even rows of street lights are being turned on, white and unnecessary. My arm, as usual at this time, is numb with holding up the paper. Some of the same women I observed valiantly setting forth for teas an hour or two ago are returning now with a sanctified air, their duty done.

The walking up-town crowd is thinning out: all over the city people are dressing for dinner. In a moment the servants will come in from the hall and draw the thick crimson curtains across the windows, shutting off my view of the Avenue until to-morrow.

But this will be the last time. I have other things to do in life besides waiting upon the whims of a girl. . . .

Ah, I knew *she* would be true to me! See how she walks! With an innocent expression as if she 'd never imposed upon me at all—Look! She is smiling—this is an historic moment. Oh, now I understand, that small girl beside her—who can *she* be? There, they are gone. I don't know where, I never shall, but I know I have seen that face before! When she smiled I was sure of it.

Torresdale can have the whole window to himself now, since he insists upon ruining his eyes.

"Good-night, Torry," I said, and arose to go.

He replied rather animatedly for him: "By the way, Nick, who 's the child with her?"

I looked at him a moment in sorrow, and then we both laughed.

## IV

This is what I heard to-day as I approached Torresdale seated in the corner with Harry Lawrence.

Harry, I may add, is one of *the* Lawrences. He knows this—and so little else, but perhaps it is enough, he thinks. "Though he travels more than most New Yorkers," Torresdale once said of him, "Harry will never in all his life get away from New York. He 's as provincial as you are, Nick, though not so unworldly."

I was behind Lawrence's chair and he did not see me at first. "She 's something new, that 's certain," he was saying with an air of authority, for Lawrence would doubtless know her if she were not new; that is, if she were worth knowing, and evidently he considered her qualified,

for he went on: "There 's a well-bred poise, an aristocratic quietness about that girl." Lawrence thinks he has it too, and perhaps he has.

"Not only that, but the look on her face, the blood in her body,—she has an air," said Torresdale, "an air that is born and not made."

"Well, I wish I knew who she is, anyway," said Lawrence, smoking comfortably.

"If you really care to know," said Torresdale with a manner of finality, which made us turn toward him expectantly—he is always saying things worth listening to—"She 's the young Duchess of Hetherington."

("Then the young girl with her," I exclaimed to myself, "is her daughter.")

"And the child," continued Torresdale, turning squarely around and smiling knowingly at me, "is her step-daughter."

Lawrence also now looked at me. I was glad I was standing out of the light, for I felt annoyed by this.

"What!" he exclaimed, turning toward me. "Do you mean to say that our Nick here is another?"

"Her discoverer!" announced Torresdale. "He 's been hugging one of the windows for a month, holding his paper upside down."

Lawrence laughed and touched the bell. "I 'm disappointed in you, Nick," he said. "I did n't think you 'd take advantage of a woman behind her back!"

"Oh, Nick with his virginal air and his mid-Victorian ideals," said Torresdale, who likes to talk, "is a devil and a dreamer in disguise. I 've watched him. Like so many of you fellows down-town he 's still romantic. There are more of that sort in Wall Street, if you only knew it, than in my trade. We have a good

deal to *say* about such stuff, but you are the ones who *feel* it."

"You do have a good deal to say," I remarked, and he stopped at last.

"But see here," said Lawrence, "there is no Duchess of Hetherington."

"I know it," said Torry; "but she is a young duchess all the same."

"How do you know?"

"How do I know? Why, look at her!"

At that moment she was returning up the Avenue in the victoria, with the little step-daughter; at least I suppose it was the same one, I did not look at the child. There was a mild scramble for the window.

"Nick," said Lawrence, chaffing, "you should check those shoulders of yours outside in the cloak-room—they obstruct the view." But I made no reply for I had a glimpse of her driving by with the ador-

able far-away look in her face, all unconscious of the eyes shooting out at her from behind our stone fortifications. In a second or two it was all over and she was gone.

"At the very least a duchess," mused Torry.

"Or a queen," said Lawrence.

"Better yet," Torry replied, "a woman."

"Good-night," said I.

## V

TORRESDALE and Lawrence are over in the corner talking about her. Let them talk! Torresdale is describing her charm with words of whose spelling I might not be sure. Let him describe. Oh, Torresdale, oh, all you fellows over there, oh, all you other men in the world, if you only knew how I am gloating over you now!

It happened less than an hour since. I had walked up-town from the office, as usual. It was one of our fine brisk afternoons of early spring we had to-day, we who walk up-town, with a west breeze from over the Jersey Palisades, and the Hudson blue and crisp between; an excellent afternoon for walking, and I

ended up at the club feeling very fit: hurried down to the swimming-pool in the basement, threw off my clothes, dived head first into the clear exhilarating water, and then, after an alcohol rub, stretched out a bit in the resting-room, with nothing to occupy my attention but a sheet, and perchance a cocktail.

I had hardly gained my accustomed chair by the window before I spied her. (Her hours are becoming outrageously irregular.) This time, as it happened, she was walking down-town instead of up, but that was not the most remarkable thing about it. With her was a man, and such a man—a Fifth Avenue beggar, a large, able-bodied impostor, formerly a crook and well known to the police. He was pressing closer and closer beside her, apparently muttering insistently: she was more than annoyed: she seemed frightened, and the policeman was at

the other end of his beat, as the beggar knew. One or two passers-by glanced a second time at the strangely assorted pair, but passed on without interfering—God bless them.

It takes a number of valuable seconds to get to the cloak-room, hand in a check, put on a hat and reach the Avenue. By the time I was there they were half-way down the next block. Suddenly I saw her stop and turn back abruptly in my direction, as if to get rid of the beggar by this move. But he turned too, and continued his demands as daringly as if this were Naples instead of New York. She, retreating and accelerating her pace, as if now in a panic, was holding out her empty hands to show she had no purse. I could hardly believe my luck, for it was the first time such an opportunity had ever come to me, and I had long since abandoned all hope of it.

Now she saw me bearing down upon them—and raised her eyelashes for the purpose of looking at me. Her glance said, rather frankly as if we were already quite congenial, "Would you be so good as to help me out of this? You look so capable."

I only raised my hat in a matter-of-fact way as if I made a daily practice of doing things like this for her, and grabbing that blessed beggar by the back of the neck, I quietly hustled him down the cross street, shaking him now and then from side to side. Half-way down to Sixth Avenue, I decided he was about scared enough, so with a parting kick I let him go. It was not a very hard kick considering that this was the only chance of the sort I might ever have for another quarter of a century, but it was a rather satisfactory kick withal.

As I turned back toward the Avenue,

I think I had a glimpse of her for a moment at the crossing, as if she had been looking on. Then I sauntered into the club and quietly joined Torry as if nothing had happened. He had arrived during my absence. "You are just too late, Nick," he said exultingly—for he had seen her on the way back evidently—"the show is over for to-day."

I picked up the evening paper calmly. "What of it?" said I.

He and Harry are still laughing at this. Let them laugh.

# VI

"Ever after nineteen centuries of Christian civilization, man is as yet but imperfectly monogamous."

I am afraid that I am hopelessly imperfect.

There are a number of us who take the walk up-town regularly, and we can not help recognizing one another's existence, even though we do not acknowledge it. We are a sort of walking-club, and naturally we take a friendly fellow-members' interest in one another.

There is a certain girl in gray.

This is a recent acquisition, and, for my part, I don't believe in ignoring new members of clubs as the older members of some clubs do. She is a very small person with all the tingling daintiness of

a geisha, and sometimes I feel like putting her in my pocket. This girl has a way of looking up at me for a millionth of a second—merely to see if it is I—which interests me. Then she looks away again as if saying, "Yes, it is you—but I am not interested; it is simply that you are so big."

Then I always say—though not aloud—"Ah, indeed? Just so, you remember me!" Then she patters along downtown, tilting her pretty little figure forward in the way so many of our girls seem to enjoy walking, and I keep on straight up the Avenue, and both of us look grave and rather abstracted; and that 's all there is to it.

So I consider it no sign of disloyalty that just at this particular second I was not thinking about the young Duchess. I had not seen the girl in gray for a very long time, and I was saying some such

thing as, "Where have you been all this while?" or "You are looking very well to-day," when out of the void there suddenly appeared, sailing down upon me like a beautiful rebuke, she, herself, alone in all her glory—and, incidentally, with a most becoming boa around her neck.

Of course she did not see me; her gaze, like her thoughts, was on high, far above and beyond any point I may ever hope to attain. But as it happens, this was very nice for me, because I could luxuriate in a full clear look at her while approaching and crossing each other's orbits. So fine and tender and true, so rich and deep and glorious. I felt that I had never really known her before.

"If ever you cared for any one," I was thinking, as all too soon we were about to pass each other, and away—"If ever *you* cared, *you* would think and thrill, and live for no one else," and at that in-

stant, as it happened, she looked up and caught my gaze fixed upon her—not rudely, I hope. She looked away again, but instantaneously glanced back, suffused me with a frank, friendly smile, blinded me with a dazzling bow, and passed on, while I felt my amazed eyes blink and the blood rush to my face. I could hardly lift my hat.

As soon as I regained my senses I readily understood how it had happened. It was a natural mistake enough. The incident with the beggar had brought us face to face, and seeing me suddenly again she remembered having seen me before, did not recall where or how, but thought for the moment I was some one she knew.

If it had been any one else, for example, the girl in gray—I beg her pardon for the thought—I should not have been so overwhelmed. I think I might even have enjoyed it, made the most of it, en-

tered into it with relish. There is a twinkle in *her* eye too, but there 's nothing starry about it.

Yet I could not help rejoicing that the Duchess remembered my face, even while it showed she had forgotten my service, though I trust she did not notice my look of shock and amazement as she bowed and passed on.

I spend more time in walking now, and that will do me good, for I am taking on weight again. The walk up-town from Wall Street is not enough for me. I go on up to the Park these days, to see if I cannot lower my record around the reservoir. It is good walking there, and no duchesses to distract one.

## VII

As I recall it now the first intimation I had was a sharp contraction in the wrists. I felt it before I heard anything, and then I became aware that the most beautiful voice in the world was sweeping and tingling through me, awakening echoes from another world where I once knew her face to face. I turned and looked, and it was she.

"Are you not the one I bowed to?" she said, with almost the same crisp, modulated tones I had often fancied—except perhaps a trifle faster.

"Oh, yes," I said, observing my hand taking off my hat as if a thing apart.

"It was a mistake," she said—such clear-cut words—"You should have

known that. Good-afternoon." She turned and was gone, leaving me gasping. Then the happy little trees and the shrubs at the bend of the path swallowed her up, and I was alone again.

How could I! Here was the loveliest thing in all the beautiful, budding May world coming to me in the most delightful part of the Ramble, and apologizing for speaking to me; and I stood still and stared at her and said nothing!

Poor little thing, probably she stayed awake at night worrying about what I thought of her mistake, and then after getting up her courage to the point of speaking to me—I did not even help her!

Before I realized it I was walking desperately in the direction in which she had disappeared; but that part of the Park has many diverging paths. I went faster and faster, finally running. On the other side of the Ramble two diverging paths

double and meet again. We doubled, and suddenly we met again. Evidently she had seen me first, and thought we were to pass as strangers—but not so.

"It was a perfectly natural mistake," I said earnestly.

She turned her face toward me, her eyebrows shot up inquiringly, she looked me over, nodded impersonally, and passed on. But I was after her. "Please do not worry about it."

Again the eyebrows shot up.

"Thank you," she said, in the same delicate, superior way; "I have not worried." It was in the tone I should fancy her considerately addressing a servant.

"Indeed," I said, "then why have you taken the trouble to mention the matter?"

"To give you a chance to apologize," said the young Duchess in the quietest voice, the most matter-of-fact manner,

and without stopping or turning she glided on down the little path and out of sight, walking as though she considered it the greatest fun to walk, and thinking the loveliest thoughts which had nothing to do with me.

I sank into a convenient bench, and looked for my cigarettes.

"Well," thought I, smoking, "whether she wanted to explain or expected me to do so, at any rate she cared to have me know a mistake had been made—and I have that much to be thankful for."

It is possible that she is not a duchess, though she has something of an English voice; but the look in the eyes is one which I have seen only in American girls. Whoever and whatever she may be, she is more of a woman of the world than I thought at first, and, by the same token, the more interesting to me. She has known and been sought by persons of

note at home and abroad, all sorts of experiences has she had in her full and picturesque existence.

What a delight it would be if, owing to a dearth of better men for the moment, she should see fit to twist me about her little finger for a while.

## VIII

A few days later I met her on the Avenue. It was quite far down, near Madison Square. She saw me coming from afar. I knew she saw me, and I resolutely fastened my eyes on the North Star, or where it ought to be, and tried to look as if I were thinking beautiful far-away thoughts having nothing to do with duchesses. I felt her take me in with a glance.

She thought I had not seen her at all, and so would give me no credit for my self-denial. I kicked myself all the way up to the Park, where I had a stupid walk.

The next time I saw her we were going in the same direction. She was one of

those I overtook in my usual afternoon walk up-town. She is not a very fast walker after all, but it took me many blocks to overtake her. She has such an adorable back.

## IX

LAWRENCE and I spent last Sunday at Ogden's. Constance Ogden is the one of whom my aunt always says: "Such a nice girl." I never contradict my aunt, and yet she always reiterates it.

Miss Ogden has a fluffy pompadour, and several million dollars in her own right. But she has more than that; she is a dear girl, and I like her very much. We are the best of friends and talk in the frankest way about all sorts of things, and agree on most of them. There are few girls to compare with her for sweetness of nature and sincerity of manner. If ever she marries any of us who hang around her, she will spoil him to death.

I can see Lawrence, for instance—he

is the most persistent—at the family dinner-table, after he has become fat and phlegmatic. Sometimes I confess I have put myself in the picture, but that makes an entirely different picture, for I appreciate her more than Lawrence ever could, though this never seems to occur to him.

I have always said that I would never marry for money; yet if I were to discover that the girl I loved was an heiress in disguise, I might not feel so awfully cut up about it. Oh, well, one does n't give up much time to deliberation when spending Sunday in the country. Most of us work indoors pretty hard all the week, and when Saturday afternoon comes we prefer exercise to planning for our futures. Men and girls both are a pretty frank, wholesome lot, and not over clever like the cynical worldlings Torresdale tells about in his stories. At least, this is true of the crowd I have

most to do with, and I am informed by my aunt, who ought to know, that they include some of the "nicest people." "But how can you tell them from the others?" I said one day to my aunt. "How can you tell which are the nicest?"

"By their names, my dear," said my aunt.

We had just arrived and were having tea on the cool terrace. Mrs. Ogden said, "Nick, would you mind going down into the garden and telling Mademoiselle that tea is here? I left her near the lower fountain below the bowling-green," she said, fanning herself.

I ought to know where that was—Constance and I had often strolled there—and I thought I would know a mademoiselle when I saw one.

The Ogdens' garden is rather large, and is old enough to have found itself. It does n't look as if it were an Italian

garden made while you wait, as do so many of our new and doggedly correct young gardens in America. At any rate it was fragrant and delightful down there in the cool of the afternoon following the hot, dirty ride out through the Forty-second Street tunnel. It was just the time of day I have grown fond of lately, and it gave me a distinct pang to think that possibly my Duchess would be passing the window at this very moment.

But there stood the Duchess before me.

With a sunbonnet in her hands behind her back she stood, all in white, looking down at some goldfish in the fountain; she had evidently been feeding them. Her back was half turned toward me. She did not stir. Nor did I. I only waited at a respectful distance and appreciated her sweet figure and the rather remarkable profile. There was no dreamy far-away look there at present; it was all

eager absorption in what she was doing, with the lips protruding a bit, most interestingly.

Torresdale, I suppose, could have seen and described in worthy phrases how bewitchingly the soft afternoon glow told on her richly-colored complexion, and how that background suited her, with the fountain and its silvery ripples, and the pergola with its fluttering leaves beyond; and beyond that the great thick bank of dark, cool trees. It is a great accomplishment to be able to use your head when your heart is using you so hard. All I could do was to stand there and gaze. It was not until long afterward that I knew she was dressed in white, and recalled that I had never seen her so costumed before, and wanted in the future never to see her otherwise. I actually dreaded hearing the sound of her voice, for I had heard it once already and knew how it

She stood, all in white

could upset me. I am getting old and find it necessary to look out for my nerves.

This did not seem to last more than an hour or so when suddenly I had a strange feeling. "She is going to turn," I said to myself, and she did turn. She did not start, her eyes merely laid hold of mine and held them. My gaze reverently bowed down to the ground before her.

Then the voice began, "I should think," she remarked unexcitedly, swinging her hat—and the tingling quality was even more potent than when she addressed me in the Park—"I should think you *would* be rather ashamed." A pause. Still looking at me and swinging her sunbonnet, "How long were you going to keep it up?" She seemed rather put out about it.

But I kept on gazing at the ground. Here at last was the one of all the world standing before me by a silvery fountain

in the fragrant twilight, with all the rest of mankind a million miles away—a thing to dream of, and I said nothing.

The voice went on.

"Do you think it manly, do you think it thoughtful, do you think it kind?"

Perceiving that she was merely having fun with me I managed to say: "I was really trying very hard to call your attention—"

"Oh, you were?" she asked sarcastically.

"—but as it happened I could n't speak just then."

"How strange!" she remarked. "Why not?"

"Besides," I went on, ignoring her question, "I did not know how anxious you were to have me speak to you—judging from a former experience."

She shot a look at me. "I'm not anxious to have you stare at me," she returned.

"I merely came to deliver a message," I said.

"Pray do so then. Can't you see how embarrassing this is to me?"

Her lips were quite grave as she said this but a dancing light in her wondrous eyes showed how embarrassed she was with me before her at her mercy.

"But the message was not for you," I said. "It was for a little French girl."

"A little French girl?"

"Mrs. Ogden said I should find 'Mademoiselle' down here some place. Have you seen any Mademoiselles wandering about the premises?" I inquired gravely.

"I am Mademoiselle," she said.

"You?" I exclaimed. "I thought you were a duchess."

"No," she said, "a governess."

"Oh," said I, while she hurried on past me with a curious smile on her face.

# X

THE others were out on the water in the moonlight, but Mademoiselle and I were on the terrace.

I was smoking and she was counting falling stars, and did not seem to consider me worth while talking to.

"I am sorry, but I do not know what your name is," said I, breaking into the silence. "I could not hear it."

She turned and looked at me quizzically. "They call me 'Mademoiselle,'" she said, continuing to look at me in her reposeful way.

"I know that, but what shall I call you?" I said, smiling.

"Mademoiselle."

She turned away and looked out

over the water, the million-miles-away look.

"Mademoiselle," I began. She kept on looking out over the water and far away for a little while longer, then she slowly turned her face toward me with an expression of calm, passive inquiry —the kind Torresdale used to call in his earlier stories, "a look of well-bred interest."

"I was just going to remark that it seems rather odd our meeting out here, after all. Don't you think so?"

I had not said a word to her at dinner. She was at the other end of the table and seemed to lead the conversation, and to be poking a little quiet fun at Lawrence, who presently became aware of it, and found the place she meant for him. Even Mrs. Ogden seems to be rather in awe of her new governess.

This governess now turned toward me,

and, looking gently perplexed, said, "Odd?"

"After those little episodes on the Avenue, if you happen to recall them," said I, flicking my cigar ashes.

"Episodes?" she asked. "On the Avenue? Ah, to be sure, you are the kind man who was so very obliging that day." She looked at me with new interest. "Thank you very, very much."

"I did n't mention it for that reason," I returned, somewhat amused. "Besides, you amply repaid me by bowing to me the next time we met." I looked at her and smiled.

"Did I?" She looked back vaguely. "Oh, yes; how stupid of me to forget."

"I don't consider it stupid," I said, pausing. "But I felt sorry to be so soon forgotten." Another, longer pause. "Had it entirely left your memory?"

She turned toward me with the sort of

interest a kindergarten teacher might bestow upon a young charge. "I *beg* your pardon—you were saying—?"

I smiled and repeated my question. "I was merely anxious to know whether it had entirely left your memory?"

"No," she replied, with a period on the end of the word. "There is another falling star."

"By George!" said I to myself, "we 'll see about this—I 'll *make* you pay some attention to my remarks." I turned to her gravely. "Would you mind very much," I said, "if I ask how it happens that you are not a duchess?"

"Because I have not married a duke," she said casually, as if accustomed to this mistake, and not particularly impressed by it, for she began to do something to the pinnacle of her coiffure with both hands, a captivating posture, her white arms gleaming in the moonlight.

I have told you only what her tingling voice said. Her manner said with quite as tingling distinctness, "I think you are rather an impertinent person."

So I became quite flippant, and determined to bowl her over. "But why *don't* you marry a duke?" said I.

"I have never before seen so many falling stars at this time of the year. Have you noticed them?" She turned toward me, and, seeing my expression, suddenly repeated: "I *beg* your pardon—you were saying—?"

"Oh, no matter," I replied. There was a still longer pause after this.

Suddenly becoming aware of my persistent presence she assumed the kindly kindergarten manner again, and, as if saying to herself, "As long as this person can talk only direct personalities, I suppose I must humor him"— "You are a

barrister, are you not?" she asked me kindly.

"We call them lawyers in this country," I said.

"I suppose you get not a little amusement out of your work?" She was patronizing me.

"More amusement than money," I replied.

Her manner was distinctly more gracious now, and yet a little bantering. "Do you hurry down to the city with an important scowl, and come home with a tired sigh like most of your kind?"

"I go through all the motions," said I.

She laughed at this and looked down at me with some degree of interest. I was sitting at her feet, and thinking that her mouth when she laughed was about the most charming mouth I had ever seen.

"I believe you are beginning to like me

a little better." I said humbly, looking up at her.

"Quite so," she said calmly.

"Would you consider it very impertinent in me to ask who you are and where you came from?" I asked respectfully.

"No," with another falling inflection, as graceful but as cold as a falling star.

"Who are you?"

"The governess."

"Do you come from England?"

"No."

A pause.

"Why do they call you Mademoiselle?"

"I asked them to do so."

"A good reason; but why Mademoiselle?"

"I began the work in France. It is a convenient title."

"Do you like your work?"

"I like the Ogdens."

"Are n't they lovely? Have you known them long?"

"They are indeed lovely." She ignored the rest. She evidently thought *I* was patronizing *her*, or trying to.

"I suppose," said I, "you do all this sort of thing because it is an interesting diversion, do you not?"

"I do 'all this sort of thing,' " she replied, "for the same reason that you practise law, presumably, though you seem to enjoy cross-examination for its own sake, do you not?" With that she arose, tall and disdainful, and I came to myself.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I cried, springing up; "I did not realize how impertinent it must seem to you. I know we have just met but—it is simply that I have happened to see a good deal of you since you came to town, though I don't propose to tell you where or how."

She was still rather disdainful there in the shadow, but I thought she seemed a little interested in this.

"The fact is, I have been seeing you — sometimes three days in succession! What is more I have sometimes even been on the watch for you, because, you see, I had fallen into the habit of seeing you, and missed you when you did n't come. I could not help wondering where you were, and what had happened to you. You don't mind that, do you?"

She said nothing, but at least she did not go.

"At any rate, I could not help it, even if you did mind it," I went on, "any more than I could help wondering who you were and what it would be like to know you, and how your voice would sound, and whether you would be willing to talk to me if we ever met. I did n't want to meet you—not a bit of it.

Because every time I have rushed around to get introduced to any of you I have always been disappointed in you. But when at last pretty suddenly this afternoon you *appeared!*—why you must admit that naturally I wanted to get the answers to some of those questions I had been asking for months. You see how it is now, don't you?"

Her only reply to this long speech of mine was to gather a little scarf she wore about her shoulders and step back through the open window into the library.

"All right!" thought I, "go in and shut me out," and aloud I said, "I bid you good-night," bowing formally toward the indefinite dimness.

Then she spoke from the dark interior of the room, her voice sounding timid and tremulous, I thought.

"Am I another?" she asked.

"Another?" I repeated, perplexed.

"—disappointment?"

"Not yet," I said.

"Then I have that much to be thankful for, have n't I?" she replied in a tone which left no doubt that she was having fun with me.

But she leaned out and gave my hand a charmingly frank shake.

"Good-by, Mr. Nicholas Brooks. After this, shun club windows."

## XI

HER name is Hulda and she is studying to be an actress. I should think but little study were required. I don't fancy the idea of her going on the stage, but Torresdale says that this shows her to be a girl of spirit.

"The trouble with you," he said, "is your mid-Victorian ideals." Then he went on: "We all have something to do here on this earth, or else we would n't be on it. Every one ought to seek his or her work—live his own life—realize his own individuality."

As it happens, she does not find much chance to realize her own individuality at present. When they were in town she managed to slip off for an hour or two

every day, Torresdale says. (So now I know where she had been and what she was thinking about when I used to watch her walking buoyantly past the club window.) But since they went to the country she has n't had a chance to take a single lesson, though I presume she practises in her room, in front of the mirror. Torry and I think she ought to come into town for the purpose about once a week, at least. But he explained that such an arrangement would involve telling Mrs. Ogden, who is an old friend of Mademoiselle's father, who does not approve of his daughter's ambition. Mrs. Ogden would also doubtless disapprove, and the least she would do would be to tell Mr. Rutherford—Hulda's father. The worst Mrs. Ogden might do would be to get another governess, and in that case we don't know how Mademoiselle could attain her ambition. Her father won't help

her. On the contrary, quite the reverse. Moreover, there is a second Mrs. Rutherford. Hence there is also a new governess in the world.

Only, she is n't really a governess; she is a tutor to Constance's little sister Edith. "Why does she insist upon calling herself a governess, then?" I asked Torresdale.

"I have an idea," said Torresdale, "that it is because above all she is feminine. The term 'tutor' connotes eyeglasses and strenuosity—imagine her with either unfeminine adjunct." He talks for hours in a most remarkable way. I suppose he does appreciate people better when he has phrases for them.

So the young girl sometimes with her on the Avenue was little Edith Ogden! It seems odd I never recognized the child as she passed the club window. ("You never looked at her," said Torry.) I 've

gone over the links with her frequently, and she is a splendid little girl golfer.

Mademoiselle was a classmate of Constance's at college—or rather, I should say Constance was a classmate of hers, for she was one of those epoch-making Athenes at college who rule and are worshiped by all, and whose colleagues boast of having been there during their reign. Hero-worship! It 's nothing to heroine-worship!

At college she acted *Rosalind* under the trees, and before that she acted with striking success at the convent in France. Torry says that acting is only one of her stunts. I now recall having heard of her by reputation. Constance used to boast of rooming in the same entry, and some girls I know once got hold of a photograph of their goddess, daringly had it reproduced and distributed among the under-classmen—women, girls, under-

class ladies, whatever do you call them? —in this way a worthy student who was helping to meet her own expenses made a lot of money. My astral notion of having seen her in a previous existence, by the way, is reduceable to a rather poor Pach photograph of her which Constance once, when visiting my sister, showed me, somewhat ostentatiously turning it over so I could see the autograph on the back. But I was a mere boy then and only took a patriarchal interest in her enthusiasm. The main point about all this is that she cannot possibly be more than twenty-five, in spite of her superior attitude and kindergarten manner.

"Just how old is your fascinating friend?" I asked Constance the other day.

She looked at me a moment as if saying, "Et tu Nickie?" and replied with a little laugh: "She and I, Nick, are old

enough not to like people to know how old we are." Constance has a charming precision in her intonations.

"She 's not much younger than you, is she?"

So straightway Constance answered, without laughing this time: "She 's not younger at all; she 's older than I—a little."

I have not been out to the Ogdens' again, though Torry has. Mrs. Ogden said she wanted me in August, but the month is nearly over now. In short I have not seen their governess again since the occasion of her warning me against club windows. At times when I have nothing better to do, I confess, I glance out of the window, probably from force of habit.

It is a dreary sight, the Avenue in August, when every one is away and the asphalt becomes oozy and odorous, and

people of a sort seldom seen at any other time take possession of the shops and restaurants in such numbers and with such bold assurance that the few lawful rulers on the scene are made to feel strange and out of place themselves. "Our city leads a dual life," says Torresdale, "and summer is the brief but shameless season of the Other One."

Oh, where are the girls of yesterday? Having a "perfectly lovely time," I trust, wherever you are; becoming richly tanned against the day of your glorious return in the autumn, when, with a fine brisk breeze that makes the flags stand out straight, you will suddenly rejoin the ranks of the walking up-town club to gladden the Avenue and me—with a guileless smile as if you had never deserted us at all. I 'll be there to welcome you.

We miss you very much. If it

were n't for an occasional trip to town for shopping or a dentist's appointment, or an interesting transit from railroad to steamship (with steamer rugs and trunks crowding the driver off the box), I don't see how we could last out from one week's end to another. Sunday is such a blessed relief. Then we go to the country, too, for a glad time of it, and back to work again on dreary Monday morning.

Yes, I have thought it over very calmly now for two months, and have decided that the charm is gone. She, alas, has proved "another one," after all. I knew it would happen if I met her. I 'm sure I did all I could to prevent that catastrophe. I can picture her to myself without becoming in the least excited. In fact, I often do picture her to myself in all her once fascinating phases.

Ah, well, perhaps it is better that it

should have died a peaceful, natural death than from one of those violent disillusionments by which in times past I lost so many of her predecessors. I recall a certain brown and red girl—her name has escaped me—with whom I golfed one day in Westchester County—I don't recall the place. I adored her all morning, but in the afternoon she forgot her handkerchief and sniffed three times. But I try not to look like a man with a great sorrow as I walk up the Avenue aimlessly.

So it is all over and done for. Even if sitting here at the window I should see her—

Great heavens! But it 's impossible! But there she is—see how she walks! Behold the notable arch of the brows! Consider the poise of her swinging body, walking as though it were—no, now that she is nearer she seems not so buoyantly

as of old. There 's a tender line of trouble on her face. And why is she on the other side of the street? This is most extraordinary. I wish I could find out. But there, she is gone. She ought not to hurry so on a hot day. Confound her!

"You will please tell Mr. Torresdale when he comes in that I have stepped out for a moment, but will be back in time to dine with him."

## XII

THERE were very few people on the sunny side of the Avenue, no one she knew was in sight, so she thought—and, by heavens, she was putting a handkerchief to her eyes every half minute. I did not wait to reach the next corner; quickly hurrying across I ran up behind her but—stopped there. What business was it of mine, after all? Being a girl of spirit she would hate, of all things, to be caught crying, and thus I should only add to her discomfiture. So I followed at a distance for almost half a block. Suddenly she began to walk faster and held herself very straight and stiff as though indignant. I, too, walked fast. She looked

splendid in her wrath. Again the overworked handkerchief came into play—the poor bit of a wet thing, it pierced me to the heart. Three long strides brought me to her side.

"May I not offer you mine?" I said, holding out a fresh handkerchief sympathetically. "It 's so much bigger. Ah, do," I found myself saying in the most matter-of-fact way, as if it were a cup of tea.

She averted her face, shaking her head.

"I have another, you know," said I affably. "I always carry two in weather like this. That 's why I am able to offer you a nice fresh, folded-up one, you see."

She only made a sobbing sound and kept her face averted.

"I 'm afraid yours won't last much longer," I said sympathetically, walking now beside her.

She turned and looked at me with that

notable directness of hers. I looked back at her, my brows still knit, and looking as serious and solicitous as possible. Suddenly she burst out laughing. As she did so one rather huge tear spilt over the edge and rolled down her cheek and dropped off to the walk and was lost on Fifth Avenue.

Thus we two on this hot August afternoon went marching up the Avenue, laughing and looking at each other. We were passing that long, uniform row of stone dwellings which somehow suggests Paris, especially as you approach the wide asphalt spaciousness of the Plaza, but we were n't thinking about that for the moment.

We became much better friends while we were laughing together. Realizing at last that we were on the hotter side of the Avenue we crossed over to the smug row of trees which line the Park.

"All right now?" I asked solicitously as we dodged a Presbyterian Hospital ambulance after some poor devil overcome by the heat, I suppose.

"All right now," she said in the nicest way. "You see I don't need my handkerchief now at all." She turned her eyes full upon me, beaming kindly; "but I thank you just as much for yours," she added.

"I do see," said I, deliberately. "I am so glad," I added, and kept on looking. She shifted her gaze as though she thought she had let me look in long enough.

"You came just in time," she said lightly.

"Did I? How so?"

"You saved my life. I 've had the most dreadful experience!"

"Really!" said I sympathetically; "any more beggars?"

"Worse, much worse."

"It must have been before you passed the—that is, before I happened to pass you on my walk."

"At his office," she replied.

"Oh, at his office," I said vaguely, but she did not seem to observe it, becoming reminiscently excited all over again.

"Good-by," she added suddenly. "See where we are! I must go back and take my train and you must take your walk. Thank you so much."

We were opposite the Ogdens' house and I suppose the sight of the dreary, boarded-up entrance and blank, waiting windows reminded her. She turned about.

I also turned about. "Would you mind my going with you?" I asked, and she let me.

"May I ask how you happened to get into his office?" I went on.

"By appointment," she said.

"Oh, I see," said I.

"He told me to come again in August."

"Why August?"

She looked at me quizzically.

"Good-by," she said jocularly. "I merely want to say good-by to you in advance, before I tell you about it; because, after I tell you about it you won't like me!" She looked extremely grieved about it.

"Proceed," said I.

"You are of the sort who cannot understand, and those who do not understand —life is too short to explain yourself to every one."

"All right," said I, knowing now what she referred to, but pretending I did n't.

"Good-by," she said again.

"Nonsense," said I.

"I am studying for the stage."

"Fine!" I shouted it so loud that I awoke three babies in passing perambulators.

She had stopped abruptly and was looking at me. She had evidently expected a different answer.

"Really?" she said. "I am surprised."

"You see, you did not know me," said I, shaking my head.

"I 'm afraid I did take you for a conventionally-minded little man," she said, dreamily.

"Not a bit of it," I replied emphatically.

"I am so glad," she said. "And you really like girls to become actresses?"

"Bully!" said I.

"Girls you know?"

"We all have something to do here on this earth," I said, "else we would not be on it. Every one ought to seek his or her

work—live his own life—realize his own individuality."

She looked down the Avenue ahead of us, smiling quietly.

"You and Mr. Torresdale seem to be great friends," she said.

"We are, yes. Why?"

"Because he shares your views; quotes your very words, in fact."

"Perhaps they were his before they became mine," I acknowledged, laughing, "but," I added quickly, "they 're mine now, anyway! I had them last."

"That does n't matter," she said kindly, as if really glad I approved, "so long as you really agree with me about it."

"Well, don't I?" I said. "But how about this brute who was disagreeable to you?"

"He is not a brute—he 's a theatrical manager."

"The same thing," said I.

Then she told me a good deal about it. It was because she was all wrought up and nervous after the experience and felt the human necessity of talking to some one, and I was lucky enough to turn up at the right moment and be the one. It gave me a delightful sense of intimacy. She is not at all the confiding kind, this self-contained young Duchess-governess.

"I tried during the previous season to secure a small part—even a thinking part," she said, smiling. "I thought it would be easy ("It ought to be," I wanted to say, but suppressed it), but none of them seemed to have anything for me, not even the littlest bit of a part."

("Those were the days she looked so thoughtful and serious as she walked uptown," I smiled to myself.)

"But they all told me that they might

be able to do something for me if I tried it again in August. That was the best time, they said; when they were making up companies for the new productions," she added. "Some of them were rather nice to me about it. This is August," she said rather pathetically, and opened her hands, sighing.

"Don't drop your handkerchief," said I. It was quite dry by this time.

"I would not have minded it so much if it had happened earlier in the day, but this was the last place I tried, and they had in most cases kept me waiting a very long time. 'It 's like a servants' employment agency,' I remarked to an actress waiting in the chair next to mine. 'Yes,' she said, 'except that we are n't so independent.' I liked her for that, and we became quite friendly. She had once been something of a success, it seems, but had made the fatal mistake."

"What 's that?" said I.

"She married."

"Is that a mistake?"

"Naturally; and now her husband 's dead and she has two children to support. She had such a kind, patient face."

The Duchess paused, and I thought, "Tell her to keep out of it," but I did not dare.

"Some of the managers remembered me and some did not," she resumed.

I doubted that, but as she was sighing in the most interesting way, I did not interrupt her.

"None of them had anything to offer."

"Not even a thinking part?" said I sympathetically.

"Not even a thinking part."

"Too bad," said I aloud. ("Glad of it," I added to myself.)

"Finally, when I came to this last place—I did not want to go there very

much, but I had to," she added, smiling at me; "I knocked on the door; 'Come in,' shouted a loud voice from within. I waited. 'Damn you, stay out then,' growled the voice. So I made up my mind to come in after all, just to punish him by showing him what he had done, you know. When I opened the door I expected to see him wither, but he did not. His coat and waistcoat were off, his hat was on and a man was buttoning his boots. He glanced up and—he did n't take his cigar out of his mouth 'Why did n't you come in when I told you to?' He did not rise nor apologize for the other omissions or anything. Was n't it a good joke on me?"

"A joke!" I cried, raging.

"I replied to the manager, cuttingly, 'I thought possibly you were not prepared to receive women callers, but I see

my mistake,' though that did not seem to affect him at all. 'What d' you want?' was all he said. 'An engagement,' I replied. 'Thought so. What can you do?' he asked, staring at me as though I were rather impudent. 'All sorts of things—in legitimate,' I said. 'What have you had most experience in?' 'Nothing.' 'Thought so.' Then I told him what I had done in amateur acting, very foolishly, and how I had been studying all winter. But he interrupted me with a laugh. 'Can't do anything for you to-day.' 'Might I inquire,' said I, 'if you think it possible to give me a chance later?' 'Nope, probably not.' 'But you said last winter,' I insisted— 'We 're full up, that 's all,' he growled and turned aside."

"Did he say that to you?" I asked, searchingly.

"Indeed he did."

"In that tone of voice?"

"Only worse."

"What is his name and address?"

"What are you going to do?"

"What am I going to do! Remember the beggar?"

"Yes, I saw you from the corner."

"Well, that 's what I mean to do."

"Really?" she asked, looking up at me.

"Naturally," I growled, looking down at her.

"How nice!" she said.

"His name, please? It 's getting late. He may leave his office."

"But of course you must n't think of anything of the sort," she added.

"Who 's doing this?" I replied.

"I am very much obliged to you, but it would never do," she said.

"But how can I make him apologize otherwise?" I asked.

"No, you might be arrested."

"Not until after I have finished."

"But suppose it all came out in the papers?"

"I don't care."

"I do. My name would be mentioned."

"Well, then," I said, "I 'll just go and quietly kick him about a while without saying why."

But she only shook her head unreasonably. "Not to-day," she said.

"You 're very inconsiderate," I said. "Why not?"

"Because I should n't like it if you were arrested. Good-by," she added, for we had reached the station, I suddenly discovered; and here was the usual afternoon rabble of scowling, perspiring commuters.

"You have a provoking habit of saying good-by," I remarked, still irritated.

"Good-by," she said. "Please don't come any farther. Thank you for your sympathy." And she hurried across to write a telegram.

# XIII

"CONFOUND my sympathy," thought I, for my talk was not finished, and I hate to do things by halves.

I watched her writing a telegram, presumably to the Ogden stables to meet her on this later train, and I dashed across the room, bought a round-trip ticket, returned to the telegraph place and wrote one myself to Torresdale before she had finished figuring out ten words on her fingers. Mine was a long one, but it was important, and I had n't time to be economical: "Sorry unavoidably delayed important business meet you on roof in time for coffee."

"Oh," she said, looking up, "I thought you had gone."

"Gone—no," I said, "but I am going —with you. I mean, if you 'll let me. Will you?"

She only looked at me.

"I find I 'll have to take a trip out your way."

Her eyebrows shot up.

"If you don't believe it," I declared, "read this telegram."

"How nice," she said.

"You won't mind if I go on your train, will you? I 'll sit in another seat, if you are tired of talking to me."

"How nice that you can come on the same train," she said, and we passed through the gate together. I sat down beside her in the car, thinking it *was* going to be nice, and it was n't at all. I suppose she had something on her mind or else the psychological moment was past; it had lasted over an hour already.

At any rate, the trip was an anti-climax. She was distrait, and became more and more cold and oblivious of me the nearer we approached the end of our journey. I wonder if the nearness to the atmosphere of the terrace recalled the old cold, moonlight mood. Possibly it was the natural reaction from emotion and from telling me all about it. Maybe it was some other peculiar feminine psychological stunt, but the harder I tried to make her comfortable and happy, the more she drew away as if she hated me for having seen her cry, though it was n't my fault, and I did n't mean any harm at all.

"We 're almost there," she said, with a sigh of relief.

"Almost," said I, with a sigh.

"Here begins the old daily grind once more." We were rounding the bend in the road. "I hate it—I hate it—I hate

it," she said, as the air-brakes were clapped on.

"Why, I thought they were so nice to you!" I said in surprise.

"No one could be nicer."

"They all swear by you."

"Yes. They intrust me with their lives, their fortunes, and their love affairs. But would you enjoy selling peanuts when you want to practise law?"

We arose to go. "It depends upon the price," said I.

"At any price," she murmured as she touched my hand (with two fingers) to get off the car.

"There are worse things than selling peanuts," I remarked sententiously as we crossed the platform toward the wagonette.

She began to laugh quietly and turned her wondrous eyes upon me. "As if I did not know all the time," she whis-

pered as I helped her into the wagonette "that you would disapprove of any girl's 'going on the stage,' as people call it."

"Oh," I protested, "but—"

"Ready, James." Then she turned to me—"But it was so nice of you to pretend all the same. Good-by." Then she was off, nodding and smiling back at me.

# XIV

TORRESDALE was looking at the moon when I reached him on the club roof-garden.

"Business all finished?" asked Torry when I had completed my rather elaborate apology.

"Oh, yes," said I.

"Then it 's time for pleasure," he said, ringing the bell for a waiter to take my order. I stretched out in my chair with the comfortable sigh of a hard-working man and looked up at the stars overhead. That is one of the things that we all ought to do more often in life, I understand, and though they were not much in the way of stars through the haze of the city, still they were not so bad as a contrast with the signs of the city far

down below us. The moon was there, too, and it was nearly full.

"My boy, you work too long," said Torresdale. "Were you working very hard?"

"Part of the time it was hard work."

"Hum," said he, "not when I saw you."

"You saw me?"

"Across the street. I happened to be up-stairs in the magazine room standing by the window. My dear fellow, not a word; you can have me to dine with you any time. I would have done exactly the same thing in your case. Moreover," he added casually, "you would have confessed it to me eventually. I know you better than you know yourself; you are the poorest liar I have ever known."

Roof-gardens are not put down as very poetic places, but there is a romantic charm about them to me. The roar of

the city came up to us in our eery seclusion with a rumbling, far-away note. We were quite alone in the southeast corner of the roof, seated in comfortable outdoor chairs with our feet braced against the granite coping that walls us in so that we need not feel as if about to fall out upon the Avenue. Behind us, near the elevator entrance, somebody was playing shuffle-board. Otherwise it was quiet, and from where we sat we could see nothing urban on our horizon above the coping except a few church spires, and, if we turned, a couple of tall hotels to the north, which elbowed their way up above the other neighboring buildings and intrusively looked down over our private garden wall quite in the manner of smart hotels.

Our voices had the thin, out-of-door quality, and the air was cool and clean away up there, and the moon was just as

good as if it were on a terrace in the country. In fact it was quite like being in the country, except that there were no mosquitos. I looked down from the moon and found Torresdale gazing at me quizzically.

"Is n't she delicious?" said Torresdale.

"Who?" said I.

"For a governess," Torresdale added.

I played with the syphon. I did not feel like hearing him dissect her charm this evening; but Torresdale had dined, was under the moon, and was with a man who was amused by his command of words and play of fancy—usually.

"There is a subtle flavor about that girl," he said, with cigarette smoke coming out of nose and mouth, "a bouquet, a delicate fragrance as of old wine which one misses in so many of our modern strappers with their brown and brawny

arms. It ought to appeal to your early-Victorian sentimentality, Nick."

I intimated that I did not care to discuss a lady in a club.

"Another Victorian ideal!" he laughed; "you 're always in character, always consistent. Did she ever show you her eye-smile?" he went on imperturbably.

I was drinking just then and did not reply.

"She has the neatest trick of looking very grave around the mouth and yet smiling palpably in the eyes. She must have learned that when she was at school in France. There 's a Gallic quality in it."

"What are you writing nowadays?" said I.

"I 'd like to write about her, but"—he shrugged his shoulders—"I know my magnificent limitations. What in the

world was she talking to you so earnestly about?"

I did not see what business this was of Torry's. "I am sorry," I replied, "but the fact is, she told me in confidence."

"Really," said Torresdale, laughing easily, "how very interesting. The pretty governess," he went on glibly, "meets the handsome young lawyer—handsome and brilliant, I should say, young lawyers are always brilliant—meets him by appointment, evidently." He left a pause for me to make a sign of contradiction or confirmation; I did not fill the pause, so he went on: "They are seen hurrying up the Avenue on a hot afternoon in earnest conversation. The brilliant young lawyer cuts the dinner he had invited his dear friend to. Query: 'Did he dine with the pretty governess?' "

I finished my drink and put down my glass.

"Don't be an ass," I said.

"Yes, I fear you are another victim," he rattled on. "Lawrence is done for. He has transferred all his devotion for Miss Ogden to Miss Ogden's sister's governess."

"Lawrence is a fool."

"Don't take him so hard, Nick; he 's merely amusing and does not know it. He can't help it; think of his handicaps."

"What can she see in him?" I asked abruptly, and Torry laughed at me again.

"Who can tell, who can tell," he mused. "She is all things to all men."

"Are there so many of them?"

"Only as many as have visited Red Hill." The Ogdens are great entertainers. "Billy Quirk is one of them. So is Purviance. Lawrence's father is another," Torry added.

"What, that old man with the white mustache!"

"But he has pink cheeks," said Torresdale symbolically. "Do you blame me for being worried even about you? Not that it is so surprising to hear of the old Colonel's capitulation, but when I observed his son who—well, Lawrence has his points, but for the sake of argument we 'll admit that he is a snob—and she is not an heiress, only a governess. Now, you also have been devoted to Miss Ogden, and you," he paused and smiled, "are not a snob."

"Rot!" I growled.

"That means that you are still true to the plump little heiress? Well, I 'm glad to hear it. My mind is relieved." My face was in the moonlight and I felt him looking at me.

The picture of dear, gentle Constance rose before me, all unconscious of being discussed and of being called plump! "Miss Ogden and I are better friends

than ever," said I with unnecessary emphasis.

"Ah! At last you 've said something. After all, the object of speech is to express thought, not to conceal it, as some of you so-called 'reserved' people think—reserved because you don't know how to talk. So she 's been telling you, too, about her work, has she?" He evidently meant Miss Rutherford. "Just like a girl, flatters each man into thinking he 's her special confidant and adviser, then tries to cover her tracks by exacting secrecy from each one. I gave the Mademoiselle credit for having better head than that. Did she tell you I was going to write a play for her some day?"

"No, she did not honor me to that extent," I replied, for he rather amused me with his assumption of superior intimacy. Perhaps I felt a bit provoked at her, too.

"Some day," he replied. "First, how-

ever, she must get a job." I was unpleasantly reminded of her own story of the actress who called it an employment agency. "And I am going to get her one if pulls can bring it. You 've got to have a pull for everything, and everything can be got by a pull. Most of you people think that any woman with a pretty face and a fine figure can walk straight out of the drawing-room on to the stage."

"Go to the devil," thought I.

"She has temperament, and, above all, beauty; all she requires is hard work and an opportunity, which I am going to get her—"

"Are you?" said I.

"—although there 's a prejudice nowadays against society girls."

"She 's not a 'society girl.' "

"She 's not of the profession, my boy. They 're always 'recruits from society'

when they 're not brought up in the profession. Oh, well, she 'll do some great thing some day, Nick. The time will come when we 'll boast of having known that governess."

"I do already," said I, not fancying his patronizing tone when applied to her. "She does not seem to be very stagey as yet," I added.

"Naturally," said Torresdale with a smile for my word "stagey." "She is not one of your stage-struck 'young lady elocutionists,' though people think she is because she is turning to the stage as the medium best adapted to her talent for interpreting life—the inherent beauty and grace and tenderness of living as well as its little ironies. Hers is an art impulse, but I don't suppose you know what that means, though you probably think you do."

"Do you?" I asked.

"Only to a certain extent," he replied, unruffled, and then went on with his subject. "She has excellent ideas. For instance, she says that she has never seen on the stage—and this shows her good head; I feared she would want to begin with *Camille* or *Magda!*—has never seen a real American lady girl of to-day. There have been plenty of provincial ingénues, and pseudo-cynical society women, so-called; there have been Daisy Millers and M'lisses and Geraldines galore, but did you ever see a genuine, wholesome, yet fine-grained American girl like, for instance,"—he turned to me—"Constance Ogden?"

"I had n't thought about it," said I.

"Frank, without being bold; humorous without being cynical; and aristocratic without being impressed by it—ah, there 's the girl."

I smoked and said nothing.

"After all, there is nothing like that other 'inherent grace and dignity' which comes of wealth and position, say what we may of certain other qualities in girls who are—not like Constance. Nick, you are a lucky man!"

"What do you want, anyhow?" said I, scowling at him.

"Scotch and carbonic," he replied, placidly, "and then an open cab. I have a long night's work ahead of me. Sometimes I envy you even-houred chaps who lead normal lives," he said, as we entered the elevator, "who fall in love and marry and have families and become staid and respectable and like other people. Let me drive you down."

"Thank you," I said, "but I always walk home to bed unless I 'm above Ninetieth Street."

"That 's right, that 's right," he said; "good, simple, normal, exercising chap,

a man who sweats—give me the man who sweats. Good-night. That 's one reason why I like you." And he drove off, leaving a little air of mystery behind him.

# XV

I HAVE to report that I have seen her again (in a white frock), and that I am now in the thick of an embarrassing mistake, and at a loss to know how to get out—without making it more embarrassing.

Torresdale, it seems to me, has missed his calling. He should have lived in a former age—sometimes I wish he had—so that he could have practised intrigue at a French court, instead of wasting his talents in petty affairs at Red Hill, where we spent the week-end together.

At first I was at a loss to understand what he was up to, but now I believe I have the key to the little mystery. I confess, I thought Torresdale man of

the world enough not to play games of this sort, but perhaps he sincerely believes he is doing me a good turn. For during our talk on the roof I undoubtedly led him to suppose (or did he deliberately lead me to declare?) that I was still interested in Miss Ogden—as of course I am—and still immune from the prevailing attack of "the pretty governess"—as also I am. It is all very juvenile and absurd, but apparently he has given Miss Rutherford to understand that I am an ardent but helpless admirer of Miss Ogden; and as a good and glib friend he has solicited her generous and potent aid in my modest behalf—with the result that she gracefully but steadfastly kept out of my way for Constance's sake, except for a few casual moments here and there, which she eagerly devoted to telling how fine and true and good Miss Ogden was, which I knew already.

It was not within my power to correct the impression Torresdale had created, without assuming an attitude toward gentle Constance which would have been brutally ungallant. So I could only agree with all her stanch friend said, and hope that the air would be cleared before we left; but it only thickened. This is always a most distasteful situation for a man, especially when it concerns a girl one respects and admires as much as I do Miss Ogden.

The worst of it is that I cannot bring myself to protest against Torresdale's possibly playful meddling in my affairs because, whatever may be his game, he apparently means well by me. I should judge from what she said in the few moments I had her to myself that he had spent most of the many hours *he* had her to himself in dilating with many phrases upon what a fine fellow I am!

The first thing she said to me—when my brief turn came at last—even before she launched forth on the other theme, was "I wonder if you appreciate your friend Mr. Torresdale as much as he does you!"

"I trust so," said I.

Her mouth was sober, but there was that suggestion of a smile in her rather remarkable eyes to which Torry had referred on the roof.

"And I wonder if you appreciate *yourself* as much as he does." We were all having tea between sets at the tennis-courts, and she was seated at the end of a marble bench there with an arm thrown over the carved back. The arm was in a thin white sleeve. I was on the grass beside her. "Do you?" she asked, swinging the suspended arm.

"I trust so," I replied, thinking that I

appreciated her a good deal in that posture.

"Did you know that he would do anything in the world for you?"

"No doubt of it," I replied.

"And did you know that you would do anything in the world for *him?*"

"Good of him to say so," I answered, wondering.

"Yes," she went on, somewhat demurely, I thought; "you are one of the 'squarest' fellows he has ever known—one of the few friends worth having. Did you realize that he had grappled you with hooks of steel?"

"I knew that he was a great admirer of Stevenson's," I replied.

"And of yours!" she rejoined again, with the sober mouth and her smiling eyes. "Is it pleasant to be grappled with hooks of steel? Does n't it ever hurt?"

"It 's the real thing," I said.

She paused a moment and remarked: "I should think Mr. Torresdale must be extremely fortunate to have such a friend."

"You might try it and find out," I suggested.

"What he particularly admires about you," she went on, undeterred, and pretending to be quite enthusiastic about it, "is that you have no underbrush."

"Underbrush?"

"No superficial subtleties. Your atmosphere is not tinted."

"Really?" said I. "So glad my atmosphere is n't tainted."

"No, *tinted*."

"Oh, tinted; well, go right on!"

"You are a vital, elemental person. You have that rare thing nowadays—character. And, let me see—oh, yes, you have a nature as big and strong and straight as your body, or something to

that effect." I was stretched out on the grass, and she glanced down toward me. "That makes it pretty big," she added.

"The last time I saw you," I interrupted, regaining a sitting posture, "we talked about *you*. Do you happen to remember?"

"All the more reason for talking about something bigger and more important this time."

"I enjoyed it," I demurred.

"Enjoyed which?"

"The other subject."

"You know you like this one—all men do." And I did a little, but I had had enough.

"Did you know you were all that?" she asked.

"Did n't you?"

"That is n't half of it," she answered, "only I 've forgotten the rest."

"Very well, suppose we let it go at

that. I am a wonder. Now, how about you?"

"Oh, yes, I recall: you have a clear head, a logical mind, and need only to be awakened to find yourself and become an ornament to your profession. The dear! Is n't she wonderful?"

The governess had suddenly turned and was now gazing with unrestrained admiration at Constance, who at that moment was dispensing tea with the gentle dignity we all admire in her. She made a cool and pleasant picture there with the silver and white of the table against the deep green foliage beyond. "That is the way with everything she does," said Mademoiselle; "she makes it seem so gracious and right."

I agreed with all she said and did not try to change the subject, for it seemed so unkind to do so, though this did not happen to be what I wanted to talk about

just then. My silence, however, she evidently construed as reticence, for her earnestness fell away and she stopped with a knowing smile.

"I don't see why you smile," I remarked.

"Oh, I 'm not smiling at her—I 'm smiling at you." And she continued to do so. "There *is* nothing very subtle about you, is there?" and looked upon me with quizzical amusement, reminding me of the look I have seen girls bestow upon men announcing their engagements. There always seems to be a jeer in that look.

But not a word did she say to me about her work or herself—though I later overheard her talking earnestly with Torry about both. I suppose from the temperament and training he can better understand each of these interesting subjects. One afternoon on the Avenue she

informed me that life was too short to bother with those who did not understand.

But I, too, should be interested to hear as much as she might be willing to tell me about the progress of her art, even though I may be guilty of having a conventional view of it. I should be very glad to be of service to her, if she should allow, for I want her to succeed in her chosen career as much as I want her to keep out of it. And this shows incidentally how absolutely objective *my* attitude toward her is, for if I were sentimental about this girl, which I am not, I would want her to fail. But I do not. If I were in love with her I would put obstacles in her path. But I do not. If I were in love with her I would lose appetite, lose sleep, lose interest in other people. But I do not any of these things. So I *am* immune. Therefore I can say

with perfect candor that I desired to see more of her than she allowed, and that Torresdale's complacent way of shunting me off toward Constance and the others while he quietly monopolized the governess rather got on my nerves. I particularly loath the type of man who creates a vulgar scramble for a girl. I did n't think it of Torresdale. It seems so bucolic. So I became more silent and inert as the visit progressed.

## XVI

T was on the yacht the next day that she said to me: "Oh, men are so queer!"

"A very original remark," I observed to myself, for I felt unaccountably provoked with her, too. "How so?" I asked, looking charmed at her cleverness.

"Because they are either too conceited,"—I followed her eyes across the deck, and as I live and am a villain, I was glad to see Torresdale there—"or else," she went on, turning her eyes toward me, "or else they are too modest."

"I don't see how I can be that after all you told me about myself."

"Who said I meant you? That clearly puts you in the other class."

"But," I said gravely, "you did mean me."

"Yes, I meant you," she said.

"But you are quite wrong. You see now, don't you?"

"Not in all ways," she said, looking across the deck again. This time I saw Constance leaning forward in her deck chair listening to the "interesting Mr. Torresdale," as they call him, in the most interested manner. Remembering my mistake of the day before, I determined this time not to keep silent.

"Is n't she complete?" I said to Miss Rutherford. "How she looks her part!"

At first the governess laughed softly to herself. "It is hardly necessary," she said, "to ask who you 're talking about." She paused and added, "She is the wonderfullest, the truest, the finest, and the best," said Miss Rutherford; "and I know girls pretty well, even if—" I

wish there were a word meaning coquetry without suggesting a sentimental smirk of the vintage of 1850, then perhaps I could tell you how she looked when she added: "even if I don't understand men."

"But don't you?" I asked. "I had an idea that they were all easy to you; that you just gave them one look and knew all about them."

"Not always," she said, and smiled in a way to say, "You know what I mean though you pretend you do not."

But I did not know and looked back blankly.

"I did not understand *you* at first," she said, "and you, you know, are quite elemental."

"Suppose you interpret," said I. "The object of speech, as I take it, is to express thought, not conceal it."

"Then why don't you?" she rejoined,

and with that cryptic reply the governess, who seems to be the commodore of this afternoon's cruise, took it into her head to make a tack, to juggle up the members of the party in the quiet unostentatious way some women have, with the result that I found myself beside Constance, and heard Torresdale addressing Miss Rutherford in his glib manner: "My dear Miss Rutherford, the days of Galahads—" the rest of it I did n't hear. With men he 's a good enough fellow, but in a crowd of women he always throws on a lot of unnecessary lugs.

All the same I noticed that the governess looked up at him with the most charmed expression as though thinking, "What a relief!"

"Is n't it nice when two very congenial people get together?" said Constance. She talks very rapidly.

I turned and looked into her sweet,

gracious face. "Those two, I mean," she said, and added, "I have been hearing such pleasant things about you."

"Good heavens, more!" thought I. "Torry is an awfully fine fellow, too!" I said, smiling.

"How in the world did you know it was Mr. Torresdale?" Constance has a charming puzzled expression; she is always so unconscious about it.

"Because it is just like him," I replied.

"Is n't it?" she exclaimed in her quick way, though usually I must confess she is not so enthusiastic as I am about Torry.

"He is afraid, though, that you don't take yourself seriously enough."

"How so?"

"Down-town, for instance."

"Oh, yes, I do—besides, there would be plenty of others to make up for my lack of it, Constance."

"You must not be content with anything but a very great success. I would so like to see you do something. You can."

"Somehow you always make me feel as though I could," said I.

"Every one says you can," she replied quickly.

"Just watch me hereafter," I answered laughing.

"I will," she said. "I will see that you don't take any more whole afternoons to take us to luncheon, as you did the other day in town. That was very wrong. But mother never realizes things, and I am afraid I forgot. I don't know what we would do without Hulda, she is the general manager of the whole family." Constance looked far across the water at the lighthouse on the point. "How do you like her, Nick?" she added. "Is n't she beautiful?"

"Yes, indeed."

"She admires you so much."

"Another? Oh, Lord! I am glad to know that I am such a fine fellow."

"She has been talking to me about you," said Constance, ignoring my remark. "She says you are true."

"I would like to be," I added, glancing as I had been doing all through our talk across the deck. "Look at him. I am afraid your governess is playing the devil with Torresdale."

"He can take care of himself," she said.

"I believe he does," I added.

"But somehow I like him better than I ever did before," she said, and then, quite abruptly for her, she turned and ran to the pilot-house to say it was time to go home for dinner. But I saw that she was blushing and that she did not want me to see it

I suppose she, too, is becoming interested in Mr. Torresdale and did n't want me to guess it. But I did!

## XVII

It was Torresdale who told me they were back in town again, and I was very glad to know it as I had not seen them for a rather long time.

I had been off on my vacation which did not come until the fall of the year because the head of the firm was abroad, and the upper underlings in the office wanted their vacations first.

Torresdale invited me to dine with him—to celebrate my return, he said; but that was not the reason as I soon saw. It was a good dinner. His dinners always have distinction, even when composed of the simplest courses. He once told me that I was quite devoid of a gastronomic instinct, but that he had hopes

of inculcating in my midst an adequate standard of appreciation to go through life with.

"They have come back to town," Torry said, with the oysters. He never lets you have a cocktail, if he knows you well enough to refuse. "I don't mind the assault upon the stomach," he says, "but I do object to the insult to the food about to find its way there. My dinners need no cocktail," he said, and added: "They have come back."

"Who—the oysters?" I asked, innocently enough.

"The Ogdens," he said. "Please, for my sake, don't use Tobasco. That 's a good fellow. Thank you."

"I had a great time up in Maine," I said, and told him about it all through dinner, which consisted of oysters, clear soup, terrapin, canvasbacks with browned hominy, celery salad, Camem-

bert and coffee. Champagne all the way through, and that 's all.

But! The oysters were all of one size and color, thoroughly cooled all the way through, but not half frozen; the soup had substance and distinction in its clarity; the terrapin was specially prepared for him in a special way, and tasted like terrapin rather than Maryland; the ducks (which he said were not really canvasbacks, but redheads, though he would not send them back if I did not object, and I did n't) were cooked but nine minutes; the celery salad was made out of only the most succulent parts of the stalks (neither the hearts nor the greenish ends); the cheese was ripe and inclined to run; the coffee was made in a special pot for him, dripped through I don't know how many times; and the champagne was '89 Veuve Cliquot—where he found it I don't know. There was no other wine,

not even Burgundy with the duck. After dinner he gave me a little very old brandy in a very big goblet.

You would be surprised if I told where this dinner was, because it is by no means a well-known dining-place. We did not go to the club because we wanted to talk uninterruptedly. It was one of the older, smaller hotels on the Avenue no longer considered smart; a dignified if somewhat passé house whose apartments were occupied mostly by flabby women, judging from the majority of the tables about us. They ate listlessly and some of them read books between courses.

"I see why you brought me to this joint," I whispered to Torry, indicating a neighboring table.

"That is not the only reason," smiled Torry recognizing as I had done the familiar cover of one of his own books. "To be read by vapid souls like that—

what a trade, what a trade! No, I brought you to this quiet place—"

"So we should not be bothered by people who know you?" I suggested.

"I had n't thought of that," he replied. "I like to be known, I like to be bothered. No, it was because at the popular restaurants nowadays I find that there are so many other personal orders sent down to the chef that these things could n't receive the delicate attention they require to make them worth while. Anybody can order a dinner; it is n't what you send down, but what they bring up, which makes or mars a dinner. Like all other arts it takes complete absorption, the real personality of the artist, to make not an apparent but a real success. There are a surprising number of fairly excellent cooks in New York with a real feeling for their work, plenty for one city full of philistines, but the

trouble is to get their excellence. Now my old friend Leon, down-stairs, is a true artist—that is why he lost his job at a huge, hyphenated hotel; like many artists he lacks in executive, he could not handle a big crew of chefs. So he is eating his heart out here cooking for women. Yes, any one with a memory can learn how to *order* a dinner, especially a simple one like this, but so few people can make a simple dinner beautiful."

"Like this," I added.

"There is nothing original about this dinner," he said. "The late Billy Florence, the actor, was good enough to include me at one of his dinners once, year ago, when I was a timid undergraduate. This was his order. Somehow everything tasted better in those days—but that 's not Leon's fault. You will be glad to see Constance again!"

I looked up quickly.

"I 've noticed," he added, "that you 've been crazy to ask about her all evening."

To be sure, I did want to see her very much, but as it happened the Duchess was in my mind at just that particular moment. I suppose the mention of the actor put her into my head.

"Nicholas, it is encouraging to see a man of your age who can still blush—why close your mouth so tight? Let go, tell me about it if you want to. What are friends for?"

"The fact is," I replied, "I was going to ask you about—is the governess still with them?"

"Aha! My turn now—no, I have forgotten how to blush, or surely I would now. The governess—oh, Nick, my friend, prepare yourself for bad news."

"Well, what is it?"

"The governess," he began slowly, looking at my eyes—

"Yes, has she left?"

"Miss Rutherford"—he was exasperatingly slow—

"Gone on the stage?"

"Worse." He looked at me with curious intentness. I felt as if he knew he was exasperating me and enjoyed it.

"Mademoiselle"—he began slowly—"has done for your poor old pal. I am in love with the girl."

I put down my glass.

"Are you?" I asked, and in that moment—but not until then—I realized that I, too, was in that blessed, cursed condition.

"Madly," he replied.

"Good work," I answered, facetiously, but tried to make it sound hearty.

"From your tone I should judge you had n't much hope for me."

"But *you* have hope though, have n't you?"

"Only a little. Do you wonder that I hesitated about speaking of it—even to you?"

I did n't know what to say or where to look. Such confidences are always extremely embarrassing to me in any case, but in this instance and with Torresdale watching my eyes—apparently not in the least embarrassed—I wanted to turn out the lights and run away.

"You two suit each other very well," I said, smiling foolishly and looking across the room.

"I wish you 'd persuade her of that."

"Want me to try?" I asked jocularly.

"You will?" he returned eagerly. "You mean it?"

I was rather surprised at his taking me up so suddenly.

"She believes in you," he went on: "Nick, you are the kind they trust." He was apparently quite serious now, and had an earnest droop about the corners of his mouth, which rather touched me. Yet it seemed odd for this wily man of the world to be taking me into his confidence, to be intrusting me with his dearest interests; I did n't know this sort of thing was done. But he was in love.

"Really?" I said, thinking of many things. "I did n't suppose that I entered into her existence enough for her to have opinions about me one way or the other."

"She says that you ring true, are a real person—she agrees with me in that, and, by the way, in nearly everything else I say about you, Nick."

A flood of recollections came over me. He had always been generous to me; had praised me to her until it was almost

ridiculous—to her and to Constance. Why was I hesitating?

"I 'll back you—if you really wish me to butt in," I said, laughing.

"Thanks, old chap," he replied, gripping my hand. "I knew I could count on you. But, see here, you must not give me credit I don't deserve. In talking about you I 'll confess I 've not confined myself exclusively to your virtues. We 've discussed you pretty freely, old man. You know how it is when one gets to talking with those who speak the same language about those whom it cannot hurt."

I considered it a sign of the honesty of the man underneath the affectations, his making this admission, especially in view of the delicate and rather absurd act of friendship he seemed seriously to expect of me. But I could not help wondering what she had said in discussing

me "pretty freely." I did not like to ask, so I only said lightly, "You are more honest than I am, Torresdale."

To which he replied, "But I am not honest at all, you know. I don't even pretend to be."

"I do," said I, "and you 've beaten me at my own game."

"I can rely on you, Nick," he answered, and we said good-night.

But, oh, such a night!

## XVIII

I SHALL not describe that night. There are ugly moments in every man's life which he would like to veil even from his own memory. But I will say this, that it is rather startling, after living for more than a quarter of a century a pretty decent civilized century at that, thinking tolerably well of yourself, suddenly to wake up and discover that after all you are a good deal of a savage. All through that long, vivid night of horror—maybe his vintage champagne or his drip coffee had something to do with making it more vivid—I spent hour after hour as the elevated trains throbbed past down at the corner, picturing to myself—not in my dreams, I was never before so

wide awake—pictured with lurid satisfaction the pleasant process of strangling Torresdale to death with my own capable fingers.

But, oh, I love her so! I love her, I love her—I keep saying it over and over and over, as though to make up for all the time lost when I thought I did not love her.

Sometimes I whisper it while hurrying about on business down in the dark vortex of Commerce. Those dimly-lighted cañons of the region of tall sky-scrapers are rather different from the pastoral valleys my boyhood's imagination had pictured as the proper background for this sort of thing. But I love her just as much. Sometimes I say it aloud late at night when no one is around and I have trudged up the long, lonely Avenue to gaze at her window. It is not a "casement," and I am not kept from her by

a moat and drawbridge; but I love her and I want her, and it hurts as much.

What a blind fool I was to think I did not love her. All the while I suspected that I did, but simply would not acknowledge it even to myself, until the trembling moment that I heard him say that he did. Then I knew.

I can see him now as he said it. He was smoking a cigarette, I remember, leaning forward with both elbows on the table, his heavy eyelids drooping and under them his gaze fascinating me. "Mademoiselle has done for your poor old pal," he said. He blew out a cloud of smoke and dropped his finished cigarette in his discarded water glass in his careless manner. "I am in love with the girl," he sighed.

As I recall it, I emitted a foolish laugh and made some inane reply. But it was as if he had dropped a spark into a lake

of oil, and heaven help me out of this now.

To wait until a better man comes along, and that man your friend, who confides his hopes to you, bespeaks your aid—then fall in love through jealousy! What a way to fall in love!

"Fall in love!" I had always thought it signified a soft-sighing, blissful state; rosebuds and moonlit terraces; congenial banter and pretty speeches. I thought it was a sentiment, I feared it was a fake. But now I know.

*He* did not hesitate; he did not stop to consider whether she measured up to some impossible ideal he had been seeking like a boy; he saw a glorious woman there and straightway loved her, being a man. . . .

## XIX

Oh, the sheer loveliness of her! The sweetness and the radiance! The dazzling radiance; the dancing, stinging sweetness! Oh, the cool serenity of her splendid presence; oh, the piercing, maddening loveliness of her overwhelming eyes!

But I can't help it; that 's the way I go about all day long, down-town, uptown, asleep and awake. I never thought it would be like this.

And all this while I am working harder than I ever worked before. It is the only thing to do. Down-town they don't know what to make of it. But it no longer interests me to speculate on what people think about me. Night comes, my

desk is closed with a bang, off go my thoughts again, dragging my heart after them. . . .

Not in my wildest moments had I dreamed of receiving for my own a gift of such immeasurableness. The thought of loving her was too suffusingly daring. At best I thought I might, by some rare good chance, be so favored of the gods as to happen along at a time of need — to punch a beggar or boot a theatrical manager are about all I would be good for — and so make her glad again as is her birthright.

And so when another man, a man I know and have supped with, ran in and dared! . . . But he is less unworthy of her than all of us other men who want her; he comes as near deserving this as any mere man could—and I am to help him win her!

Will she want him to win her? I

should like to think not, but I fear she will. If so—yes! yes! I tell myself, above all things, her happiness.

I tell myself I will help, but can I make myself try? To fight for her would be a joy, to die for her a privilege, but to live for her thus! . . .

I had always believed I might be up to playing the hero if the time should come. I remember hoping that it might come, as boys will. Here it is upon me, and I am shrinking like a coward.

But I gave my word to Torresdale, and my work is cut out for me. I am to see her this afternoon.

## XX

HAVE seen her.

But great good did it do Torresdale; though, God knows, I tried hard enough. I met with unexpected obstacles. Every time I led—skilfully, as I thought—up to the subject, I found myself there all alone! She had flitted off elsewhere with a guileless smile which made me wonder why. Has Torresdale been making more progress than he let me know? Has he become too dear to her to endure the mention of his name by me? Or is it merely that she thought I was trying to avoid a certain other subject? Certain it is that every time I referred to Torresdale—and I dragged in his hateful name a dozen times—*she* dragged in with the

kindest persistence and that most charmingly objectionable smile the no longer always welcome name of Constance.

Indeed, our talk sadly lacked the high, heroic note I had so painfully planned to insert. Perhaps it was her fault; she is not a very serious person; she somehow does not seem given to being renounced. Perhaps it was all my fault in not choosing the right time and place for renunciation; the sparkling Avenue in the frivolous twilight hour with the throbbing life of the city about us—no place surely for self-abnegation! I 'll do better next time.

But witness that I made an honest effort—at least at the start. The very first thing I said, when the door had closed behind us and we were alone upon the street, was calculated deftly to lead up to the subject of my friend Torresdale.

"How does your stage work go?" I

ventured, and braced myself for the shock that would come when she swung her gaze around and up at me.

"Quite well, thank you," she said, and looked away again to bow most graciously to some one passing. "Constance tells me that you are doing finely downtown. I am very glad."

"Glad, are you?" thought I to myself. "I believe you have the most adorable mouth in the world." Aloud I said: "You have resumed your lessons with What 's-his-name, the retired actor. Torresdale tells me."

I observed her face closely at the mention of his name, but to me her face was as inscrutable as it was beautiful, and her answer was: "Yes. Constance says you argued your first case in court the other day. She and I agree that it is good, your doing court work; so many modern lawyers—"

She swung her gaze up and around at me

"Have you seen any more managers? Torry thinks that you—"

"Constance also says—"

"Torry—"

"Constance—"

Then we both laughed a moment, and the carriages and people passed by us two laughing together, as happened ages ago in August. They were different people then; so perhaps were we, but it was the same laugh. There is so much to say about this very human laugh of hers (though this to be sure has nothing to do with Torresdale). For instance, it is one of those laughs which bring the lashes almost together, leaving only a little peeping place for the eyes to gleam through merrily. At times a rare dimple appears in one cheek which straightway vanishes mysteriously, leaving the place quite smooth again as if suddenly realizing that, after all, a dimple were a rather

frivolous, incongruous thing for a girl of her height. Strangely enough I cannot recollect with certitude whether it is the right or the left cheek. (Will make note of this the next time it appears.)

Our laugh was soon over and I proceeded once more to the object of our meeting—but with a somewhat familiar result.

"Suppose we take turns," she suggested in the low-voiced way she does her joking, dropping her eyes instead of raising them as most people do at such times.

"You first," I said, realizing now that her clothes were tawney brown, and hoping she would always wear that dress hereafter. But having led me away from Torresdale, she shifted the subject to something else, though I can't remember what. I know that there was but one subject in my mind, and of it I could not speak.

"Constance is going in for settlement work this season," presently said Constance's good friend, interrupting my thoughts. "Is n't it just like the dear?"

"Who 's that? Oh, yes; yes, indeed, quite like her."

She began laughing quietly as we crossed a side street, a hansom-cab suddenly separating us.

"You were laughing back there," I said.

"Yes."

"At me?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why?"

"Because I could n't help it."

"I 'm glad I 'm amusing."

"It 's always amusing. I 'm sorry, but the funniness of it always appeals to me."

I was silent for several steps, but in this growing silence, keeping time to our

footsteps, there was a clamoring chorus of "I love you, I love you—oh, I love you. I love you, I love you—oh, I love you."

Presently she spoke in a very nice, sympathetic way, "Forgive me. Do! I did not mean to be a jarring note."

Not knowing how to answer I said nothing. She came a little closer.

"Come, don't make me have such bitter remorse. I 'm very, very sorry now."

I remained silent.

"I 'll never, never do it again."

To her I made no reply; to myself I said: "Look at the eyes, listen to this pleading note! I must make the most of it." I had forgotten there was a man named Torresdale, and she, thank heavens, had let up on Constance.

"You laughed at me, Miss Rutherford!" I said in a hurt tone.

"But I 'll never, never do it any more," she pleaded in a childlike manner.

"Oh, yes, you will. You always laugh at me. I ought to be used to it," and I came near adding aloud: "If you don't stop looking at me that way, I 'll shout aloud and shock these passers-by who are staring at you." I believe some young woman I had seen before was passing; she was dressed in gray, or something, but I hardly noticed.

"But, indeed, believe me, I 'm most sympathetic about it, and I 'd like so much to be your friend—only," she said, looking very sad, "only you won't let me."

"I don't think you really want to be a friend of mine," I said soberly.

"Oh, but I do. You don't really know me—"

"That is true," I said accusingly; "you are different every time I see you."

"Dear me!" she replied, "that 's such an old, old thing to say to a girl."

"Because it 's so true." There were so many old, old things I wanted to say to her.

"*You* are very different, too," she replied with conviction.

"Nonsense," I replied.

"And men have no right to be different. Sometimes I am very much impressed by you."

("Hear, hear!")

"I 'm almost afraid of you."

"Of me?"

"But for the most part—"

"Yes?"

She hesitated. "For the most part?" I said, leaning forward eagerly. We were passing the brilliant rugs of an oriental shop, I remember, and were quite alone.

"For the most part, you seem about

eighteen," she concluded. Then added suddenly as if remembering something. "Yes, it 's just like Constance to want to be useful on the East Side. She is so good. It will be a great blow to a number of men, to be sure. But think how they 'll adore her over there." We had turned home again. "What do you think of the idea? She has such a high regard for your opinion."

"Fine idea," I said vaguely, and then suddenly realizing that our walk was half over and that I had done nothing for Torresdale, I asked abruptly:

"Is n't Torry a bully chap?"

She made no answer.

"I tell you," I declared earnestly, "he 's one of the best fellows in the world."

No answer.

"You think so too, do you not?"

Miss Rutherford burst out laughing.

"Why do you laugh?" I asked sternly.

Then she laughed again. "So transparent," she said.

"What do you mean?" I asked quickly.

"Why did you change the subject from Constance so abruptly? Why have you suddenly taken such vehement interest in Mr. Torresdale?"

"But why did you suddenly begin talking about Constance?" I asked accusingly.

"Why did you *avoid* the subject?" she retorted, smiling as if from a superior height.

"And why do you avoid Torry?"

"Avoid 'Torry?'" she asked, perplexed. "Dear me, what an idea. Why should I avoid a subject so congenial—to both of us?"

I have thought over this reply a long time.

But she only smiled at irritating inter-

vals the rest of the way home, while I trudged along at her side, trying unsuccessfully to keep my gaze from her sweet profile.

Not another word did I say about Torresdale, not one bit of good have I done him.

Instead of trying to make her care for him I was only trying all the while to discover whether or not she cared for him already.

But surely that is something I should know in order to have a working basis. Therefore I made a point of seeing her soon again.

## XXI

"WHAT do you mean by that?" I asked, rising to take the cup of tea she was good enough to make for me. We were in the library. I had chosen an afternoon when I knew that Constance would be making calls with her mother—in order that I might talk freely of Torresdale.

"That under your ingénu exterior you have a depth!" she said, filling her own cup, "a hidden depth which most people know nothing about, would never dream of—even discriminating people like myself," she added, showing that she was merely chaffing. She was in blue, and it seemed strange to me that she did not always wear blue.

"I have a hidden depth, have I?" I was interested to hear that I had a hidden depth.

"Yes," she said, smiling at me. "One can't see the bottom of a muddy stream, but that does not mean that it is very deep, you know."

"I see," said I, "I 'm a clear one, am I?" She leads the conversation as she wills—usually away from Torresdale, unfortunately.

"Yes, but so deep that it is impossible to see it all, or to appreciate its quiet force." She was trying to look solemn as she said this. "For instance, if it had n't been for what clearly came up to the surface Wednesday—"

"Wednesday?" I asked.

"Or whenever it was, the last time I saw you."

"Much longer ago than that: it was Tuesday."

"But the point is," she said, taking pains to miss mine, as I could see by her twinkling eyes, "that until then I could not help being rather skeptical. So many things made me so. But now I am fully convinced."

"Fully?" I asked.

"Perfectly," she answered, smiling in a superior fashion.

"Then perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what you are convinced of. I am interested in this myself. It is not every one who can have hidden depths."

"Convinced of—what is in the hidden depths!" she replied with her lovely laugh, and to see her look at me with her head tipped to one side one might have thought we were the most understanding friends in the world. It is the left cheek the infrequent dimple chooses.

She referred of course, as I now see, to

Constance, but at the moment I was blind enough to believe she had guessed that I was working, valiantly, for Torresdale—and jealous enough to fear she approved of my efforts in his behalf. I find it impossible nowadays to think clearly until an hour or two after I leave her; I am up in the clouds the whole time, except when down in the depths.

"Now let me ask you something," I began, stirring another cup of tea, "will you?"

"Ah," she replied, brightening, "I would so like to be taken into your confidence."

She would so like to be taken into my confidence when I would so like to take her in my arms.

I wrenched off a few years of my life and said, "Do you think I stand any chance of success in this project?" I 'm afraid my voice betrayed a struggle,

which, however, must only have helped to mislead her.

She looked at me in such an adorable way, such a tantalizing way, then said softly: "It could do no harm to try."

Her tone was non-committal enough, but her words sent icicles to my heart. "But do you want me to try?" I inquired, smiling only with my lips.

"By all means," she replied, dropping her eyes, as if expecting me to begin forthwith.

"Then I will try," said I, and straightway took a long breath to begin wooing for Torresdale at last. But on my life I could not think of a thing to say. I believe my resolution was sufficient—I trust so, but words, only the words failed me; and the longer I waited the more awkward I became. She too was ill at ease for once. "And no wonder!" thought I. "Has n't she given me permission to talk to her in behalf of my friend? Laughing

permission, to be sure, but she means it all the same as her forced conversation and over-facetiousness shows." But I had nothing to say.

What a pleasant position to place a girl in! What a loyal way to treat a friend! What a fool I was to give my word to Torresdale, and what I fool he was to open up ways for me which I have entered on the pretext of helping him, knowing in my "hidden depths" it was only for myself.

When at last I left the presence I was wringing wet with dishonest sweat and had to go to the club and take a plunge. In the cool-minded calm which followed, it was borne in upon me that if I really meant to keep my word to Torresdale I must employ some means less direct and dangerous.

Therefore I decided to appeal to Constance.

## XXII

HAVING been very busy helping Torresdale of late I had seen but little of Constance (or of Torry either, for that matter); but evidently she did not care, for she snubbed me all evening and seemed as nearly unkind as Constance could be. I could not help smiling to think how mistaken her good friend Hulda had been in her well-intended endeavors to make me believe that Constance cared for me. How little, after all, girls understand one another!

"But, Constance," I said, "there is something I *must* talk to you about, something which cannot wait much longer," and glancing at me in an odd way, as though tired out by my persistent annoyance, she let me lead her away from

the other men to a quiet corner of the picture gallery, saying nothing.

"Won't you sit down?" I asked.

She allowed herself and her pretty fluffiness to sink into a window-seat.

"I am afraid," I added, observing her closely, "that you have been dancing too much again." It seemed to have made her hand tremble.

Constance shook her head but said nothing, being fatigued.

"Now then," I began. "First of all, don't you really consider it a crying pity that she is going on the stage?" I said this in an adroit manner as if it had just occurred to me, but I had a purpose in it, as you will see, and was watching her out of the corner of my eye. I saw her eyebrows go up and then come down again. We had not been speaking of Hulda.

"She is in love with the idea," said Constance quietly.

"I know all that, but there are so many better things to be in love with."

"For example?" she asked.

"The East Side," I replied gallantly.

"I am afraid you can't convince her of that."

"I can't convince her of anything. That 's why I am seeking your aid in the matter."

"My aid?" echoed gentle little Constance. "You flatter me." She uses these stereotyped phrases sometimes, but her voice and manner lend them distinction. "Why don't you apply to *her?*" she said, and looked up at me.

"I have done so," said I. "If I had been successful I should not have appealed to you in this matter."

"This matter? What matter?" asked Constance, in her rapid manner of speech. "You have n't confided in me, you know."

"I am very anxious to do so though. I am doing it now, you see."

Constance waited. She has a great deal of her mother's repose.

"Well," I began, "your little sister's governess is rather stunning, you know."

"Indeed yes."

"And men—you know how men are. They can't help it, Constance."

There was a pause.

"But I should think," said Constance, looking straight down the long room, "that men would prefer—to attend to all that sort of thing by the direct method. It seems somehow nicer to me."

"Sometimes it is necessary to apply all sorts of methods, you know."

She seemed to be considering the matter.

"It is really a difficult thing to meddle with," she said.

"Amen!"

"It is so delicate—almost fragile, don't you think?"

"I agree with you again. We always agree, don't we, Constance?"

"And she always seems so much older than I, Nick—not that she is much older; I only mean that it would be very hard owing to our peculiar relations; she knows so much, is more experienced, more brilliant, more beautiful, more—everything."

"Of course it is like you to say that," I put in sincerely.

"If she and I were less intimate it really would n't be so hard, strange to say. I have told her so many things as if she were my older sister and so—"

"So you refuse?" I asked, and oh, that I should confess it, I was hoping that she would refuse.

She hesitated a moment and then looked up at me. "Of course I 'll do

anything you ask of me," she said quietly.

"Fine!" I shouted. "That 's very fine. Shall we go back and dance?" I wanted to change the subject for a while.

"But what do you wish me to do, Nick?" Constance was fanning herself rapidly. "I don't feel like dancing."

"You can decide how best to do it; you know her—and I suppose you know how she regards him."

"Regards whom?"

"The man we 're talking about—Torry."

Constance stopped fanning quite abruptly; and to me, observing her closely, this seemed significant. "Why, are there others?" I asked, laughing to hide my sudden alarm.

"Oh, yes," she replied, "but one never knows how many. Let 's dance."

"Do you feel like it? You know the

doctor warned you that if you kept up your East Side work and this pace too—"

"Oh, bother the East Side, bother the doctor, I want to dance!" and dance she did. "They 're so suited to each other, Nick," she declared with the enthusiasm girls always manifest in match-making.

"Yes, I suppose they *are* suited," said I, grinding my teeth.

"Oh, he 's such a fine fellow," she said as we approached the other side of the floor.

"Bully chap," said I weakly. "One of the very best," I added vigorously.

"He is just the man to make her supremely happy," she said, beaming at me.

"Ah, yes!" said I, echoing her tone as best I could.

"Maybe I can do a good deal to aid your friend."

"That 's good of you," I said. "You 're dancing with spirit this evening." We reversed again. "How do you intend to work it, Constance?"

"Oh, bring them together constantly at the house."

"I see. He comes a good deal already, does n't he?"

"Yes; but never fear, I can manage it. Mother would n't approve; she has other plans for Hulda, but mother need n't know."

" I see," said I. "You 're pretty good at this, are n't you?"

"Then, too," she went on enthusiastically, "I can subtly let her know how highly I regard him."

"Of course," said I. "You regard him pretty highly, don't you?"

"Oh, yes."

"And does *she* regard him pretty highly too?" I did not want to seem like pry-

ing, but how I waited for Constance's answer to this question.

"She thinks the world of him," said Constance enthusiastically.

"How encouraging you are!" I sighed.

"Though sometimes," Constance added, "I have fancied she does not altogether trust him. But maybe that 's merely my own prejudice against him. But I am all over that prejudice now; so will she be when I tell her what you think of him. That ought to have more weight than anything," said Constance flatteringly.

"I have already dwelt a good deal on my admiration," said I.

"So that is what you have been talking about to her so earnestly? What a loyal friend you are! Oh, Nick, you should have let me help you long ago."

"But you see it 's such a delicate thing to handle," I remarked.

"Oh, I will be careful."

"Almost fragile, is n't it?"

"Not when it 's an old friend like Mr. Torresdale."

"You don't think you 're too intimate a friend of Miss Rutherford's?" I asked. "Your relations are peculiar, you know."

I was leading her across to Mrs. Ogden, who was suppressing a yawn, for it was rather late.

"You must leave it all to me," she said with enthusiasm.

"No," said I, vigorously. "I will still keep a hand in it, Constance."

"Do you think you 'd better talk to her any more about it?" asked Constance thoughtfully; "you might overdo it."

"Never fear," said I.

"It might do no good. She might think that it was merely a man's loyalty," urged Constance. "But when I, who know you so well, tell her what you really

think—this is really a woman's work, Nick, you might bungle it," she said.

"We 'll see," said I. "Good-night."

"Oh, don't go," she said.

"I 'm tired out," said I, "and I 've got my day's work to do to-morrow."

"Bungle it!" said I to myself grimly, as I marched down the long, silent Avenue. "It strikes me I 've done unfortunately well."

## XXIII

I HAVE tried to keep away, but I can not. Telling myself it is for Torresdale's sake I invent opportunities for seeing her. I fear it does him no good, I know it does me harm, and yet I go and go again.

She, all unsuspecting and with the kindest heart in the world, looks upon me sympathetically as a poor, lorn lover—as indeed I am!—who comes to her for advice and is too abashed to ask it. And being what she is she even subtly tries to hold out hope for me, which if I really were in love with Constance might prove my undoing—and then think how sorry this kind governess would be! But it is sweet and like her, for she wants us all to be happy.

So she allows me to come close to her where I may see how fair she is—and, oh, how fair I find her!

"Now that I know it can not hurt you," she seems to say, "I will let you look into my eyes and see how true my friendship is." And I gaze and gaze, not wanting her friendship, and knowing well how it will hurt—until my heart clamors and my head whirls, then take to my heels—only to come back again.

Torresdale now goes more often than ever to the Ogdens. He has the excuse of talking to her about her stage work. She has decided to take his advice, I hear, and study another year before making a second attempt to go on the boards. Ah well, good luck to her.

"You never speak of your stage work to me," I said to her yesterday, skilfully shifting the subject, for she had been telling me for my encouragement that it was

very wrong to sacrifice happiness to false pride.

"No wonder I don't speak of my 'stage work,' as you call it," she said.

"Why is it no wonder?" I asked.

"You don't approve of my ambitions," she said with something of the archness of the first days of our acquaintance before she assumed the kindly sympathetic attitude. She is a girl and can't help it, she is a beauty and can't help doing it well.

"You know you hate it," she said.

"What nonsense!" I replied.

"How would you like one of your own sisters to do it?" she asked, looking at me, and being so transparent, I was seen by her to shudder.

"I can't help it," I said. "Forgive me, but I hope I will never see you on the stage."

"There is nothing to forgive," she said.

"And you need not come to see me on the stage."

"Oh, it 's all right," I replied, trying vainly to hedge and at the same time to do Torresdale a good turn; "only there are other things in life than interpreting it. Seems to me it is a pretty good thing not to forget to live in the meanwhile."

"But think how much more selfish that is," she declared.

Maybe she was in earnest; maybe she was joking; I can never tell.

"That 's monastic; that 's medieval," I replied. "We would not be given lives if we were n't meant to live them." Then I tried to explain that her views were impious and illustrated rather eloquently by pointing out a bush we were passing in the Park. "What right would it have to hold in its buds when the spring comes," I said or something equally sen-

tentious; "the best good it can do in the world is by becoming a bang-up bush."

"Of course you regard it that way and like to think of buds and things." I looked up and saw fun in her eyes, then knew that I was supposed to be the blushing lover again. Dear little Constance, it all seems so unfair to her. Fancy how she would feel if she knew a man she did not care for was being joked about aspirations which he did not happen to entertain. They will make me hate Constance if they keep this up, and that is a still more horrible thought. But I can't help it. It is all your fault, Torresdale; on thy head be the sin.

"How are you and Torry getting on with your play?" I ventured again valiantly.

"What play?"

"Is n't he writing a play for you?"

"Some day he says he intends to," and

then she dropped her eyes—or did she raise them?—lowered her voice, or did she raise it? Whatever she did seemed abundant proof to me of how she loved him and of how adorably unattainable she was for me.

"I should think you would be very fond of Torry," I said.

"He has stalwart friends," she said, looking at me.

"He deserves better ones," I declared, taking the bit between my teeth and refusing to be guided by my anxious ego. "I hope you will appreciate him, Miss Rutherford." And then I had to mop my brow.

"I think I do," she said, in the young duchess manner once again. It might have had a dozen different meanings. I thought of all of them. One thing alone was clear: I cannot keep this up. The best way I can serve Torresdale and save

myself is to run for it, and that is what I am doing.

They are giving me more responsibility down in the office and thanks to that I am going away for a long trip in the West. That makes a convenient break, and when I return the habit of staying away will no doubt be securely established.

## XXIV

The Avenue sparkles with a joyous holiday crowd; the jubilant sky-scrapers reach high in their exuberant might; the staccato of horses' hoofs, the laughter of the passers-by make happy music in the clear, frosty air. I am with you once again and it is good to be here.

How the white smoke curls and swirls in the west breeze. In the dreary old days before steam and high buildings they had to get along as best they could with castles and knight's plumes. Here comes a covey of jolly little matinée girls, talking vivaciously, their eyes still big from the satisfying sentiments they have enjoyed. Here is a group of sturdy undergraduates home for the holidays

and properly reckless. Here are my old friends the engaged couple, still engaged and happier than ever, peering into the windows of antique shops, doubtless planning their marriage for the spring. We shall miss them on the Avenue, but others will take their place.

It is twilight now and the lights have been turned on, the long, even rows meeting in perspective and glowing pleasantly. Dressmakers' little girls are hurrying along with bundles bigger than themselves. Next best to wearing the dresses is the pride of carrying them; not many people are granted this distinction —boys never, for they would not carry the bundles with such awed respect.

Across the way, in the Park, children are coasting down a little hill. The snow is a bit soiled by the city, but the sleds glide as easily and the coasters are quite as happy.

Every one I see seems glad to-day, and so am I, for at last I am to see her.

. . . . .

"I 'll find out, sir; please step in."

A small clock ticking energetically in another room. The muffled patter of horses' hoofs outside along the asphalt. But louder and faster than these seem my heart-beats while waiting for the familiar rustle.

"No, sir, not at home."

"Say I 'm sorry to have missed her. Merry Christmas to you, Robert."

"Same to you, sir."

The dull closing of the door, and the cold nakedness of the bleak Avenue stretching monotonously in both directions; strident voices of ubiquitous children across the way; hordes of vulgar, selfish-faced people; hideous brazen hotels; poor pinched-faced little girls work-

ing overtime and carrying such big bundles—how hard and hateful and dreary it all is, in the dusk and gloom. See that frowsy woman of the town; such a pathetic leer as she turned down the side street which stretches drearily down to the darkness and despair of the river. What a sorry lot we all are. The loafers on the benches hug themselves to keep warm, hands folded under their arms, chins on their chests, thinking, thinking, like me, like all of us—"each one busy with his woe."

She had promised to be at home to me at this hour. I counted upon it for so long—how could she forget!

. . . . .

I COULD not keep on by the same route; it was all too eloquent of her. I know just how the corner looks at this time of the evening where first I saw her face to

face, just as I know the architectural details of every house in the side street down which I pushed the beggar. All up and down the Avenue there are landmarks of the journey I have been traveling for so long.

I crossed over to Madison Avenue, an inoffensive little thoroughfare, favored of lovers and baby carriages. As it happened I saw a pair of lovers ahead of me as I turned in, a happy pair, I judged, from their attitude and slow pace. They were walking in the same direction, but I would soon overtake them so that they could not flaunt their happiness in my face for very long. Besides, I am used to it, I should not mind.

They were only half a block ahead of me but the light was in my eyes and they were lost in the shadow. Presently that light was behind me and they emerged into the brightness of another light

which flared up suddenly at that moment. It was Hulda and Torresdale. They were talking earnestly, and their faces turned toward each other were silhouetted for me against the darkness beyond. Never shall I forget that picture in black and white. He was half turned toward her as he walked and she was smiling up into his face. If I could only forget that smile. Then they passed out of the white light into the dark shadow and left me gazing after them alone. I turned resolutely to the west. Even the Avenue was better than this.

## XXV

I STOLE into the club and upstairs to a room that is usually very quiet, although it is called the "Conversation Room"; a pleasant, subdued place of beautiful proportions and ugly wall decorations. Down-stairs the rooms were full of men, laughing, talking, drinking, smoking—I wanted to get away from them. What I really wanted was to get away from myself, but this seems impossible, I have learned. Time passed as I sat alone by the fireplace.

"*Hello*, Nick, how are you, dear old chap?" It was Torresdale, and he was sauntering lazily across the room toward me, with one hand in his pocket and the other outstretched most heartily toward me. His is a very flattering cordiality.

I told him that I was well and glad to see him, two lies. I felt ill at ease in his presence and longed to have him leave me. Strangely enough I felt almost afraid of him, as if there were something momentous and sinister in his heartiness.

"You have treated me shabbily lately," he was now saying, touching a bell for a servant. "I have seen nothing of you; won't you dine with me to-morrow?"

"Can't. Engaged."

"Congratulations!" he returned facetiously, but I only smiled feebly. It seemed such puerile wit, and I was in no humor even to pretend to like it.

"I 've really seen so little of you," he repeated in his most charming manner, looking very regretful as he said it.

"I have been out of town," I replied.

"Yes; I hear you have been working hard, doing nothing but saw wood lately,

eh? They tell me you have taken a great brace down at the office."

"Who said so?" I asked.

"Who do you suppose?" he replied, insinuatingly. I refused to join in his mood. "Who would be most likely to know about you?" he continued teasingly, "and to want to talk about you?" He laughed a little at me.

"I suppose you mean Miss Ogden," I said impatiently, wishing to get it over with.

"No, I don't!" he replied to my surprise.

"Who then?" I asked, looking up.

"I mean—Constance," he replied laughing at me.

"I see," said I, and he leaned back in his chair to scrutinize me, chuckling softly.

"Oh, Nicholas, Nicholas, you are such a beautiful bluffer," smiling in the inti-

mately insinuating way I have seen him smile at her—and she seemed to like it. "But you are right to stick to business," he added. "When a young man disappears from the club," he mused, "I always ask, is he studying medicine or is he engaged to be married?"

"I am neither," said I, laughing it off and arose to go.

"I am not studying medicine," he said, smiling at me, "but, Nick, you can imagine how I would like to be the other thing." I had not asked him, but there was a very decent look on his face as he said this, and he made me feel more kindly toward him.

"I am sure I have done what I could to comply with your extraordinary request," I said guiltily.

"I am sure you have, Nick; you need not tell me that. And I appreciate it too. I have been trying to show my

appreciation, if you care to know it."

"Very good of you, I am sure. Would you mind telling me how?"

I did not intend this to sound sarcastic and I don't believe it did, for he replied: "Suppose you ask Con—I mean Miss Ogden—" and laughed teasingly. "I am leaving no stone unturned for you, my boy. A little touch here, a little dab there. Soon all will be right."

"That 's good of you," said I; "but I wish you would not take so much trouble in my behalf."

"But it 's a pleasure!" he declared.

"It never seems to occur to you," I rejoined, "that you might be mistaken in your inferences."

It seemed to me that with his quick perceptions he perceived exactly what I meant to convey but he only replied, patting me affectionately on the arm: "Don't yield

to those passing moods, my boy. That is the way so many people make lifelong mistakes. I know you better than you know yourself and—don't make any mistakes. Well, you need n't look so solemn about it," he added lightly. "Why do you avoid me lately? Don't you trust me?" he asked.

I had not accused him.

"I was wondering," I said. "whether you did well to trust *me*."

"I 'll take my chances!" he laughed, and made me take a drink with him.

Perhaps I was emboldened by this, for I said with what lightness I could command: "Well, Torry, tell me, are you making progress?" feeling like an intruding meddler as I did so. He looked at his watch.

"I must be going on," he said. "Good-by—glad to have had a glimpse of you once more."

There followed a bad night. I could not blame it to champagne this time. Indeed, now that I think of it, I had not dined at all that evening.

All through the blackness of the night I saw the brightness of her face smiling up at him as I had seen it gleaming in the ring of light on the street corner, while he, drinking in the richness of it with his critical, heavy-lidded eyes, leaned toward her as if to take possession of her. While I lay there stretched out rigid on the bed but throbbing like an engine, I carried on some notably brilliant dialogue with my friend Torresdale, and I fashioned feverish scenes far more powerful than any in his stories.

We met on a far-away, distant vastness. I don't know just what a vastness is but I saw the wilderness I used always to picture on hearing certain passages of the Bible. All three of us were there.

She stood silhouetted against the pale orange dawn on a high cliff, looking down upon us, serene and beautiful as ever. And then . . . oh, well, never mind the rest; of course I came out on top!

But that does not seem to be the way things are managed nowadays.

## XXVI

THE young Duchess was sitting on a circular marble bench in the garden near the fountain where I saw her on that memorable occasion nearly a year before. She was dressed in white again.

"But if I really cared for a girl, I 'd tell her so," she was saying, "if I were a man." The accent was not on *I*, it was on the last word, and there seemed to be a wealth of scorn in it.

"But suppose circumstances—"

"Bah! A man would n't balk at circumstances." She seemed to be rich in scorn this afternoon.

"But can't you imagine certain possible contingencies—"

"No, I can't; all false pride."

"Oh, but I don't mean just what you

do. I am speaking of a different sort of thing. Unfortunately, one has to consider—"

"Consider? Nonsense! Oh, if I were a man, I would show you men how to do the business."

I looked at her critically for several seconds, then swallowing other things I said: "I am very well content that you are not a man."

"Ah, you would be afraid of me," she said tauntingly, "if *I* were a man."

"Oh, but I am already, you know!" said I, and added: "How would you do the business? Why don't you teach me?"

"For one thing, I would not continually run away. And I would not invariably assume an attitude of humble inferiority."

"I see; that 's what you *would n't* do; now kindly tell me what you would do—teach me."

"Why, I would stride into her presence with a bold front, sure of myself and sure of her." The Duchess imitated the stride, the bold front, and the sureness.

"I see," said I. "Suppose you were n't, though?"

"Then I 'd pretend to be! And I would make love to her with might and main, sweep her off her feet and into my arms and keep her there forever."

When I finally recovered my breath I ventured to make this inquiry:

"You say you 'd make love to her—tell me how that 's done," for I did not mean to miss anything. She scrutinized me with a smile. "Sometimes you take me in completely with that ingénu manner of yours."

"I have heard there were a great many different ways," I said.

"Oh, yes," she said; "some men for instance—"

"You, I suppose, have had to listen to all the ways there are, have you not?"

She looked thoughtful a moment and shook her head. "No," she said, "I don't believe so," and seemed so earnest and honest about it that I had to burst out laughing, which relieved my feelings greatly.

"But I only want to know how *you* would do it," said I.

"It would depend on the girl," she said. "Give me a girl."

"I can't think of any," I said, being able to think of only one.

Whereat she laughed compassionately and looked down upon me once more.

"I should n't think you would find it so difficult," she said, encouragingly, and glanced up toward the house as she did so. "I should n't think you 'd have to look far."

"To be sure," said I, turning about

and facing her, "you, for instance—that 's not far."

"Oh," she cried, really startled for once, "that 's hardly far enough!"

"All the same," said I, judiciously, "I should think you would do."

"At a pinch?" she asked.

"At a pinch," I said, getting up to walk to and fro.

"That makes it more difficult," she replied, smiling a little consciously.

"Yes, I should think it *would* be rather difficult," said I, sympathetically.

"What?" she said straightening up, "to make love to me?"

"Successfully," I added gravely.

"Oh," she said, relaxing, but looking up at me as she did so, "I don't believe you really need teaching.

"You promised!" said I, anxiously.

"Well," she began, then hesitated, laughed, and looked at me.

"Well?"

"For one thing," she began tentatively, "we always like to be told how nice we are."

I looked at her critically. "You are rather nice," I said.

She raised her chin as if to remind me that I was only a pupil this afternoon. "It should be done more subtly than that!" she said scornfully.

"What else?" I inquired.

"We always like our looks to be praised."

"You," I remarked judiciously, "are a rather good-looking girl."

She shrugged her shoulders, for that was not very subtle either. "And our intelligence to be acknowledged."

"You must know a good deal," said I, quite brusquely, "or else—how could you hold down your job?"

"But above all," she rejoined emphat-

ically, "his attitude must be respectful, worshipful; there must be subtle homage in the tones of his voice, in his every movement when in my presence."

"I thought you said he must stride in, sure of himself—sure of you—take a superior attitude, and all that?"

"Yes, but it is n't necessary to be rude, to remind one of things one would like to forget once in a while."

She was smiling still, but as I live there was a quiver about the corners of her mouth. My heart leaped to my throat. I stopped walking up and down.

"Any man that could be rude to you," I declared with perhaps unnecessary emphasis, coming closer to her, "ought to be drawn and quartered, then chopped into fine pieces and burned. Any man who would stride into your presence with arrogant assurance, and not fall down at your feet and humbly beg your pardon—

why, why—good heavens, don't you see nobody could feel that way with you! because, because you are you, you see! Now if I were going to tell you," I rattled on blindly, "that I dared to presume to care for you, I would go down on my knees before you, like this, and I would bend my head, so, and explain beforehand that I was telling you all this, not because I thought you cared a rap to hear it or because I dreamed of standing any chance, but because it would probably make me feel a little better to have it out and over with, and you in the greatness of your heart would possibly grant me this favor because you hate to see even a beggar suffer unnecessarily."

She laughed nervously about the beggar. "As a rule," she said, "I don't like them to kneel." I started to my feet.

"Then I would come up very close to

you, like this,"—she was still sitting on the bench and drew back as I bent over her—"and I would look into your wonderful eyes—so, very intently you see, because it would be for the last time, and then you would see what was there and I would only say, 'I love you, oh, I love you so! I don't know why I love you as I do; of course you are the most beautiful and the best, but that can account for such a little bit of it. I only know that I love you, love you, love you. I always shall.'"

She had kept drawing farther and farther back in her seat as if trying to get away from me as I, leaning over her, went wildly on; and now her head was back as far as it could go against the marble panel. Her hands were tightly closed at her sides and she looked up into my eyes, which were near to hers, as if helpless to escape, and as if pleading to have

I love you, love you, love you

me stop. Suddenly she sprang to her feet and brushed past me, gasping: "Here they are!" Then I came to myself, just in time, as Constance came down the terrace steps, followed by Harry Lawrence.

"Very good," pronounced Hulda to me in her most duchess manner, "very good indeed. I had no idea that you were so clever at imitations." Then she laughed nervously, but whether from fear that the others had overheard or from certainty that this was no imitation at all, I was in no condition to determine.

I said nothing, for the reason that I knew not what to say. Her laughter ended, and now there was a memorable silence.

"Well, what 's the joke?" broke in Lawrence.

"He has been telling me a story—most amusingly," said Hulda.

Again the silence, I aiding it manfully.

"Well, tell it to *us*," said Lawrence.

But Constance never said a word. Having glanced once at me, she looked at Hulda—rather longer—and then not at either of us again.

"He is going to tell you," said Hulda to Constance; "he was only practising on me."

"Thanks," said Constance very quietly, with her back turned. "I should not care to hear it."

"What the deuce!" said Lawrence, perplexed, impatient. "What the deuce! Come on and get some tea." For that had been their message for us.

I left on the next train. There was only one thing for me to do now.

## XXVII

"TORRESDALE!" I cried, bursting into his room. "I 've got to have a talk with you—when can you see me? Will you dine with me this evening?—Can't you make it luncheon?—When may I expect you?—Have you breakfasted?—Could you come now?"

Torresdale finished the sentence he was writing, put down his pen, took off his glasses, rose, crossed the room, and shook my hand with deliberation. "How do you do?" he said. "So glad to see you. Do sit down. No, in the big English chair. It becomes your Gothic style better. There!" He pushed me down with both hands. "Now then, dear old chap, will you tell me the occasion for

this display of emotion?" He leaned over to touch a button on the desk and I waited until the buzz in an inner room ceased, then I answered, now more calmly. "I was afraid I would miss you; that was all. Why don't you have a telephone?"

"To prevent interruptions," he replied whimsically.

"Your servant did all he could to keep me out," I said as the latter entered. "Don't jump on him for it."

"Scotch," ordered Torry, but kept on looking intently at me.

"No," I said; "I won't stop now. I looked all over town for you last evening—but I don't want to interrupt you now."

"You have already," said Torry simply. "So it 's all right, you see. I don't care to eat at this time of the day, thank you."

"I won't take much of your time," said I.

"I never begrudge my friends any amount of my time; they can have hours. All I request is that they keep out of my psychological moments which are sometimes the result of weeks and months of baffling toil and travail of soul. That 's what you down-town fellows can't understand about interruptions."

"I am sorry," I repeated.

"But this is not one of those moments," he added gracefully, "so—" and he pushed the decanter toward me.

"Thank you, I 'll take mine without Scotch," I said, reaching past the old-fashioned decanter for the quaint little silver water-pitcher. "I never drink in the morning," I added in order to make things seem less strained.

"Is it morning?" he inquired, wearily

lifting his heavy lids to the small French clock on the mantelpiece.

It was eleven of a bright Sunday morning, and Torry was in evening clothes. "What do you want to talk about, old man," he added, filling his glass, and I gained an impression that he was not so careless as he pretended to be.

Now I had planned to carry him off to an elaborate luncheon at the quiet hotel where he had taken me for that memorable dinner, and lead up to it gradually; but perhaps it was just as well. "I want to talk about Red Hill," I said abruptly.

"You might do worse," he said, lifting the glass to his lips. "You might do worse," he repeated, putting it down again; "though of course we both are prejudiced," he added. "I had heard they are out in the country again," he glanced lazily over toward a small Louis XIV desk near my seat. There was a

litter of envelops and letters there in various sorts of writing. I abhor that sort of furniture. Most of Torry's stuff is of that sort except my chair, which he once told me he had purchased expressly for me, fearing that I 'd break the gilt things. "They have asked me out there for this week," he began affably. "By the by, I thought you were spending Sunday there."

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, I heard."

"I was, but I left last evening—in order to see you."

"I suppose you and Constance—" he began with a view to leading the conversation as usual it seemed to me. But that was not what I was there for.

"I came to tell you," I said interrupting rather rudely, "that this thing has got to stop! I can't keep it up any longer. That 's all I came to say. Go on with

your writing." I rose to go. He began to laugh at me.

"Suppose you sit down and make that speech all over again;—it was a good one," he said. "What the deuce are you talking about?" he added, shifting his position so that he was in the shadow and my face was still more strongly in the daylight.

"You can guess what I am talking about," said I.

"Don't!" he burlesqued a shudder. "Don't be so tragic about it." He lighted a cigarette.

"Torry," I said, "tell me honestly, are you a friend of mine or not?"

He laughed and said with simplicity, "Yep."

"There have been times when I doubted it," said I, flushing angrily.

"I would n't do that, if I were you," he said.

"I am sorry, but I could not help my feelings."

"Doubted my friendship?"

"I feel better for confessing it."

"But you don't doubt it now?" He looked at me and I looked back at him. "Don't *you* believe in me, Nick?" he asked.

I looked a little while longer and then I lowered my gaze and said: "If you believe in yourself, then I believe in you."

"Why, my dear old boy!" said Torry, smiling at me quizzically, "I should never dream of doubting *your* sincerity."

"Perhaps you had better do so," said I.

"Nothing could make me," he said, gazing at me and shaking his head slowly.

"Perhaps you will be convinced when I tell you that there have been times when I wanted to wring your neck," I said.

"Bad as that, eh?"

"I can't keep up the pretence any longer of being what I 'm not. So I came here to tell you about it. I 'm sorry to make such a scene over it." I laughed uneasily.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Briefly this: two men can not care for the same woman and remain friends. At least, not when I am one of them. It may go on in your books, but not here. Now you know what I mean."

He seemed about to speak, then checked himself. He reached for his glass, then drew back his hand and began to laugh.

"You great kid, you! What a mess of trouble you have given yourself for nothing. Why, my dear fellow, I don't want your millionairess; she has no temperament." Then he took his drink.

I am certain that he knew what my words meant to convey. So what he

thought to get by bluffing I can not imagine—unless it were merely to gain time. I only looked back at him intently, for I made up my mind that he would have to make the next move if I had to stare at him for an hour. Somehow as I gazed down upon him he seemed very puny and absurd, and for once I was not impressed by his cleverness, his success, or his temperament. They all seemed like upholstery to me, Louis XIV upholstery, though that may have been because I was hating him.

Presently he made a sudden movement and raised his eyebrows, as if with the dawn of a new idea. "Ah? Is it possible that I have made a mistake?" he asked in his delicately modulated voice.

I only looked at him.

"You don't mean that you have shifted —a steady old horse like you?"

I sneered a little, still looking down upon him.

"But, old man," he said, palpably on the defensive now, "how could I guess? Why, that 's not in character. Don't you remember what you youiself said? That she had proved a disillusionment?"

I kept on looking.

"Did n't you?" he asked.

"But there is no doubt about what I mean now, is there?" I asked.

"None whatever," he replied, and laughed with apparent interest. "This is quite exciting," he added.

"Then I 'll go," said I.

"Oh, no, you won't," he said, jumping up to intercept me; "not yet. This is not at all a nice way to go." He laughed. "Nick, 'is all over between us?' " He still had the impudence to be amused with me.

I knew it was best to go, and yet I waited.

"Come, sit down; tell me all about it. These things will happen. It is unfortunate, but it 's nothing to look that way about."

"There is nothing to tell," I said.

"Are you to be congratulated?" he asked. "Don't forget that I am to be your best man; I make such a bully best man. I think I 'd make a better best man than a bridegroom. Am I the first to congratulate you?"

"Of course there is no occasion for that sort of talk," said I.

"Do you mean that she has turned you down?"

"I have n't given her a chance to."

"Have n't you?" he asked, apparently surprised.

"Naturally not. I had to see you first."

"That 's so; that 's just like you, Nick; you 're such a nice boy; but you can now, as far as I am concerned—can't you?

You have given me fair warning—have n't you? Do you think she has guessed?"

"If she has not she soon will," I replied, laughing with him now. "That 's why I had to see you."

"Well, well," he said, "that is very nice of you; but don't take it so tragically. It 'll come out all right in the end. We 'll still be good friends, won't we, Nick?"

I suddenly perceived what a lot he was getting out of me, how I was playing into his hands as usual and turned on my heel abruptly. "You remember what I said about wringing your neck?" I remarked.

"Dear me!" he laughed. "And this is one of the times?"

"I 'm afraid so," said I.

"Bad habit; you must break it, Nick."

I started out, he stopped me again.

"Is n't it queer about these things? Love makes asses of us all. It may be a grand passion, but it makes its victims very small. Good-by—and do take it easy when you get out there, take it easy."

From the hall as the man was handing me my hat I saw him cross back to his desk, sit down calmly, put on his glasses and take up his pen again, seemingly easy and secure. But at the time I only felt the relief of getting the load off my mind and I felt almost jubilant as I hurried down to the street.

## XXVIII

"GRAND CENTRAL — hurry!" I shouted to the first empty cab in sight. Then I raced sacrilegiously down the Avenue, and through the familiar Sunday streams of stiffly-starched people, who used to divert me and now seemed only a stupid crowd, fond of crossing the street slowly in front of my cab. I had but a few minutes to catch one of the infrequent Sunday trains.

No doubt it would seem odd, my sudden reappearance, but not more odd than my abrupt departure Saturday afternoon. And neither thing was as wild as what I had in mind to do when I got there. I was possessed of a consuming, an unreasoning longing to get it out and over with now that I had the right to do so.

They had just finished luncheon and were taking coffee on the terrace when I was announced.

"So you have come back again," said Mrs. Ogden, rather coldly it seemed to me as I came out to shake her hand. The others turned and looked, and I felt that they all saw through me, not only the family, but even the other guests who were there with coffee-cups in their hands. This helped to make me rather incoherent in my mumbled explanation, I fear, and Mrs. Ogden did not nod and help me out as usual, but merely waited heavily for me to finish. I turned to salute Constance. Her hand was as cold as ice, but not so chilling as her manner.

And then I turned toward Hulda, thinking: "What do I care how the others treat me now that I am going to see *you?*" But all that I saw was her long, lithe back as she disappeared with one of

the girl-guests down the steps between two marble urns of trailing flowers.

"You have had luncheon?" Constance asked, her look following the direction of mine.

"Oh, yes," said I, laughing as if she had said something witty. "Or rather, no," I added.

"Do come in," she said, leading the way to the dining-room. The way she said it made me follow slowly

Possibly it was because the servants had begun clearing the table and did not fancy being interrupted, but I felt as if they too must be feeling coolly toward me. Even the luncheon was cold. Constance apologized in her most precise manner.

"I am sure it is all my own fault," I assured her. She did not contradict me.

We must have said something more during that ghastly meal, but I can only

recollect telling her that I had n't a very good appetite and that she said that she was sorry. Ordinarily I might have burst out laughing and asked what it was all about, have had it out and over with, but this was not ordinary. Something had happened; it was in the atmosphere; but I could not make out what it was, though I stayed on throughout the chilling afternoon and evening, hoping that by so doing I might see Hulda. That first glimpse of her was my last.

It seemed plausible enough when I heard later in the afternoon that she had gone out with some of the rest for a long run in Harry Lawrence's new touring-car—an engagement which had been made, I assumed, before my arrival. But when it was announced that she was dining in her room, because of a slight cold acquired during the afternoon, and was

still too ill all the evening to come down-stairs—then at last I got it through my head that she was avoiding me. Why?

She was not down for breakfast in the morning, but as we drove off in the wagonette I thought I detected the glint of a white frock behind the mullioned windows on the landing of the stairs. Why?

## XXIX

THE earth has gone all the way round once more. I am still upon it breathing, eating, smoking, working, worrying. (We take days off for the Fourth of July and New Year's, but seldom for our love affairs.) In all this time I have learned nothing—except how the Avenue looks when the dank, gray dawn comes in over the East River gas-houses. Then I wrote a note.

"If you don't mind very much," it said, "I am coming out to call upon you Wednesday afternoon late. I hope you will let me see you—it is important. Will you?"

It is difficult to see three hours' hard labor in that note, but that is what it

cost, all the same, and I hope the House Committee will never discover how much club paper I wasted upon it. The labor was wasted too, for the note received no answer. So I telephoned: "Miss Rutherford was engaged." Then I telegraphed —no reply. On Wednesday I called anyway.

"Yes," said Robert, the butler, who approves of me, "Miss Rutherford is in." He disappeared with my card. I sat down in the reception-room and waited, trembling a little.

"Miss Rutherford is not at home," said Robert returning.

"Thank you," I said, and retreated in my sorry-looking hack, defeated.

"On the other side of the house, on the terrace or peradventure in the garden is Torresdale," I announced to myself. "Very likely she is in white, or maybe it is the blue check gingham frock,

or else it is—but what does it matter?"

. . . . .

I DINED at a miserable tavern in the village and then drove out again, choosing an hour when I knew she would be in the school-room with Edith, her charge. I wrote on my card, "Won't you please see me,—only for a moment." Surely I had a right to call upon her as any other man upon any other girl.

"Miss Rutherford begs to be excused," said Robert, returning.

He saw my face and seemed sympathetic. "Very sorry, sir," he ventured, dropping his eyes.

"Thank you," I said. "Good-night, Robert."

"Good-night to you, sir."

As I stumbled out in the darkness toward the light of my Jehu's hack I dis-

tinctly heard Torresdale's high-pitched laugh ring out of the other side of the house.

"Waiting for lessons to end," I said to myself. "To the station," I said to my driver.

## XXX

I HAD all sorts of theories to explain different elements of the situation, but no one theory explained the whole thing completely. Nor did this note from Hulda clear it up. I speak of this note as if accustomed to receiving many of them; it was the first and the last. It is of no importance to record how I behaved about it.

"I cannot tell you how sorry I am to be [she had written "seem" and had crossed it out for "be"] so rude to you. You are entitled to a far better explanation than I can give, but I am hoping that you will find it possible in some way to forgive me without any explanation. Good-by—Please not to call upon me again. Believe me, sincerely yours."

I made a million meanings out of this.

"Good-by?" What nonsense! Do not call again? I came that afternoon at six o'clock.

"Miss Rutherford has gone, sir."

"Indeed? For how long?"

"She has left us, sir. She is not coming back."

"Gone, eh? Where?"

"She did not say, sir—went very sudden like."

"She must have left an address for forwarding letters, Robert."

"Not with me, sir." Then he added in a lower voice: "Her luggage went down to town, sir, on the 10.06."

"And you are quite sure she is not coming back, Robert?"

"That seems to be the general understanding, sir."

Robert was an old, discreet English servant. I fancy he has witnessed and

taken part in all sorts of household situations in the years that have made him gray and scholarly-looking. I thought he could find out her address if he wanted to try.

"Robert," said I, giving him a present.

"Yes, sir." He looked up at me with intelligence in his inscrutable countenance.

Then I thought better of it. "Nothing. Good-by, Robert," I said to him.

"Thank you, sir; thank you. Good afternoon, sir," and I had my farewell glimpse of the hall of Red Hill.

## XXXI

I HAVE scoured the town for her, but found her not. I have sought out her friends, but none has seen her—none had even heard the news I bore, of her having left the Ogdens. Wherever she has gone, whatever she is doing, it is clear she does not care to let me know or follow.

## XXXII

THEN came out of Red Hill, most unexpectedly, this remarkable letter from my aunt, telling much I wanted to know, a great deal I did not care to hear, but nothing of what now, more than ever, I am determined to discover —where my love has flown.

"You great, naughty boy," my aunt wrote, as aunts will, "I 'd like to shake you, if you were n't so big. Why am I so fond of you? You are n't worth it.

"Now, my dear, foolish nephew, I am not going to scold you for anything you have done, because knowing you I fear it might only make you do more and worse! If you wish to flirt with pretty governesses do so by all means—and I 'm

sure you chose an exceptionally pretty one. Only, for pity's sake, don't get caught at it. But if you should be so incautious, then do not proclaim yourself guilty by blushing like a boy or, if you can't break that engaging habit of blushing, pray at least restrain your incriminating impulse to flee from view by the next train; or, if you should be so unimaginative as to do that, at any rate, when you have cooled down at a distance, do not straightway return the next morning so avowedly, so indelicately, so obtrusively, for the sole purpose of seeing the interesting young person again; or, if you should so far forget yourself, do, please, *finally* come to your senses and cease to pursue a governess when she shows the good sense to avoid you. In short, do not be a fool.

"But, oh, dear me! It becomes worse and worse, the more I learn of the little

comedy (which the Ogdens are doing their best to make into a tragedy): special trips out from town to call upon the young woman—without so much as inquiring for the others!—dining in the village to call again; sending in touching appeals on your card; the telephone-bell ringing; messenger boys busy, and so on. I myself have been a witness to some of this, and I am bound to say—but no, I 'll say nothing, for fear you 'll tell me that you have conceived a boundless passion for a governess. Tell me so if you wish—tell her too, if you like—only do not, I beg of you, flaunt it in the face of the girl you are going to marry. Girls do not like it.

"Altogether you see you have made it exceedingly difficult for your poor devoted aunt—whom you do not appreciate—to persuade the Ogdens that you are still attached to Constance, and that this

amusing affair has been merely a harmless bit of gallantry such as every man at one time or another, after marriage, if not before, yields to when a pretty woman makes up her mind to tempt him. But the Ogdens were always simple, homely folk—excellent stock to marry into, Nick—and their conservative notions of propriety are severely shocked. Yet, thanks to me, they no longer blame you. Being women they understand the helplessness of a mere man—and more especially a guileless boy like your big, handsome self—in the hands of a designing female who has brains to back her beauty.

"We had all observed you suspiciously for some time, you may as well know, and so the garden scene and these subsequent astonishing gaucheries on the part of its hero were all that were needed to fan little Constance's smoldering

jealousy into a flame of fury which ill becomes her Ogden repose. And now the governess, from being an ornament to the household, a comfort to its mistress, a beautiful influence to its daughters, the most efficient of social secretaries, and a dear friend of the family, whom 'we considered one of ourselves,' has suddenly been transformed into a brazen adventuress, a vain and selfish traitress, who, in the guise of confidante to trustful Constance, has played the most outrageous trick one sweet girl can play upon another.

"Of course, they take an extreme view of the matter and are, I think, rather uncharitable, but women always are toward other women—when there 's a man in it. They don't seem to realize that the poor girl has her way to make in the world and can not stop to consider the interests of others, even those to whom

she is beholden. Doubtless she thought that you were worth the capturing. You look it. You have the air of one who can command the things which—being a bachelor—you are fortunate enough to enjoy. How was she to know that you are quite as penniless as herself? It was a perfectly natural mistake. Even Becky Sharp made her mistakes at first, you recollect. When older she will investigate beforehand and thus save herself much time and all concerned a lot of trouble. Well, she knows now. I told her. Hence her abrupt retreat from the field. (So if you are concerned over anything you may impulsively have said, you nice, innocent child, do not worry any longer. She will never hold you to it, my dear.)

"In my only interview with her she still maintained a statuesque calm, the pose of blameless superiority, as if *she*

were the injured one, which had so exasperated Mrs. Ogden, and which convinces me that the young woman is quite justified in believing in her future on the stage. 'I suppose you know that you have ruined my nephew's prospects in life,' I said abruptly; 'he has no others, Miss Rutherford,' I added.

"I am convinced that she was surprised at this—she must have been—but she is such a consummate actress that she concealed her chagrin and disappointment under a mask of lofty indignation. 'I am sorry for him,' she said—really quite condescendingly—'but after this, suppose you do your own match-making. I am little Edith's governess, not your nephew's,' and she swept out of the room.

"Two hours later she left the place with your amusing Mr. Torresdale. Where she has gone, or what she is doing, we do not know, but I am convinced that

she can take care of herself. The field is clear. Come when I give the signal. Constance still believes that she hates you furiously. That is encouraging rather than otherwise—the little dear. She will forgive you if you approach her as I direct. Women will always forgive when they can't get what they want without forgiving."

## XXXIII

COMING up the Avenue glistening in a soft spring rain I found my love alone, walking very slowly toward the north with a fine, brave look on her sweet young face. All I could see at first were certain downy tendrils of light brown hair which the bright spring mist made sparkling and wonderful against the black velvet collar of her long blue rain-coat; then came into view the delicate line of her cheek, and I knew that it was my beloved and that I had found her, alone in the teeming city where such as she should never be alone. The sloping shoulders under the loosely fitting coat—such inefficient shoulders for battling with the world, the slender young body, not fashioned for fighting—all

that is tender and appealing in woman called to me there in the mist and rain.

There was little now of the mysterious personage about her, no strange duchess to be worshiped from afar; she was my heart's desire, the woman I wanted for my very own; my mate, to protect and care for till the end. And this I swore she should be as I hastened to overtake her. I could not speak. I only ran to her side rejoicing—and startled her so cruelly.

"Oh!" she cried, and then—"It is you?" she asked in such a different tone and with a little flutter of many sudden sensations, one of them relief, I think, for she sighed as if quite content to have me there for the moment, and gave me her hand. Through two thicknesses of gloves it set me all a-tingle.

"I have frightened you," was all that I could say at first.

She looked up at me with such dear trust in her cloudless eyes. "Now I 'm not frightened," she said, and let her gaze rest on mine for a moment longer, with a glow my heart made the most of. I shall never forget that look; that much, at least, is to be mine forever. She was no longer frightened, yet there was evidence of a little tumult within, which even the rain-coat failed to hide.

So for a space we two walked side by side in silence, each wondering how fared the world and how much was known across the gulf of scarce a yard between us.

"It 's such an adorable afternoon," she said.

"Is n't it?" I responded, looking down at her face.

"See the soft, floating mists."

"I have seen them," I responded.

There was a pause, then: "Oh, I 'm

so sorry about it all," she broke out abruptly.

"About what?"

"Everything."

But I had room in my heart only to be glad, and said nothing. All that had happened since last we were together seemed a long nightmare, now ended. What the future held for me would be discovered in a little while; but for the present it was enough to know that she was beside me, and, best of all, that she was willing, even glad, perhaps, to be there. Of Torry I did not think at all for the moment. She still found much to say about the mist and the reflections on the glistening street.

"I am glad to see you," I interrupted. "I have tried to see you for a long time."

There was a pause. "I begged you not to," she replied.

"You did not tell me why."

"I had hoped you would not ask that."

"You prefer not to let me know?"

There was another pause; for an instant her shadowy eyes sought mine—I 'll swear it—with a thoughtful tenderness I had never dreamed could be there, and they seemed as clear and frank and free from guile as a little child's—how was I to know? Then, before my surging heart could word its clamoring, she was away, soaring out of my reach like the young duchess of other days, for, looking down at me with an amused smile: "It 's nice to have seen you," she said conventionally; "good-by. You must n't come with me."

I ignored that, having no thought of complying. "I sent you a number of letters," I said.

She made no comment.

"Did you receive them?"

"I received them."

"You did not answer."

"No."

"Are you answering now?"

"Please come no farther," she replied.

"How far are you going?"

"I? I 'm going very far." She stopped to dismiss me.

"I, too, am going very far." I did not stop.

"It will only make more trouble," she said, but started on with me.

"For you?" I asked.

"No, oh, no," she replied. "Nothing can make any more trouble for me."

She said it lightly, as if wanting no one's sympathy, but on her sweet profile I saw a look which cut me to the heart. I felt a melting glow of tenderness and then a suffusing wrath—a passion of protection. "As for those who have been unkind to you!" I began, somewhat excitedly it seems, for she put a restraining

hand upon my arm and bade me hush as if I were a boy. There were other people in the world, I now discovered, some of them were passing us in the mist upon the Avenue. I looked down at the hand on my arm. She took it away.

"You must promise not to do anything of the sort," she said, laughing at me, though not unkindly. "You do promise, do you not?"

I promised nothing, but was reminded of a time long ago when I wished to thrash the theatrical manager who had been rude to her. That was the day she ceased to be the strange lady of my imagination and became the woman of my heart, though I did not know it then. We walked on in silence for a moment.

"By the way," she said, "tell me what you *thought* of doing; but you must n't *do* it!" she added quickly.

I laughed from sheer joy of her.

"Let 's not think about all that just now," I said, walking faster. "We are taking a walk. Nothing else matters."

But the faster we walked the faster beat my heart, and the higher up the Avenue we went the higher rose my hopes.

"This is where I met you with your beggar," I said. "You remember the beggar?"

"The dear beggar!" she answered, then added: "He brought me a good friend—I proved unworthy of him." She seemed to mean it, and was thinking it over, apparently, her gaze far away to the north, as she used to look when first I saw her on this street, long, long ago.

I smiled and held my peace, biding my time. "Back there by St. Thomas's was where you once spoke to me by mistake. Do you recall that?"

"Every time I pass."

"And here is the club window where I used to look at you. Did you ever forgive me for that?"

"I liked it."

"But you stopped coming by this way after you knew it."

"Not until after you found out that I knew it."

"How did you happen to be coming up the Avenue this time?" I asked.

She answered at once: "Hoping to see you."

She said it casually, but I took heart. "Just to see me?"

"Just to say good-by. This is our last walk together, Nick. May I call you Nick?"

I did not refuse her permission to call me Nick. But for my part, I could not believe it would prove to be our last walk, though as yet I would not tell her so. "Then let 's make it a long one," I

replied. "Do you remember the path around the reservoir in the Park? It 's fine up there on a day like this, little waves slapping against the stone masonry, and the smell of the water, and sometimes there are wild ducks out in the middle."

"Let 's go up and see the ducks," she said.

So, side by side, we marched upon the reservoir, but I forgot all else except that we two were together. Of what she thought I could only guess—and hope.

By and by we came to a little bridge leading off from the reservoir over the bridle-path. This we crossed, and I remember how a reckless rider came plunging through below us, and that we could not see him, though so near, for the fog had closed in thick about us. The galloping died away in the hidden distance.

Soon we came upon the Ramble with

its tangled paths, where once we met, where first I heard her speak, before we knew each other. I thought of that; she too, perhaps—I did not ask her. And now we reached a broad and open grassy space with trees on either hand, though these we could not see, nor aught else now except each other, as on we strode together through the soft and ever-thickening mists. It was silent and mysterious there, and we might have been upon a lonely moor, a million miles from the city and its strident noises, though in its very center, the calm storm-center; and now my heart set up a furious clamor to be heard.

"We must turn back now," she said, so evenly, so easily. "See, it is growing dark. Our last walk together has been very nice."

"No, our first one—really together," I replied, turning toward her gently as I

spoke, "but not the last. All those other walks, all I tried to do—it was all a lie. I love you," I said, close to her glinting hair. "I think you know that."

"Don't, Nick!" she cried with a gasp as if I had hurt her thoughtlessly. "I did n't know it, I did n't!" and now was all a-tremble. "Yes I did, but—you must n't." Yet through her crimson distress I thought I saw a golden gleam of rejoicing at my words. But the fog was thicker than ever now and the light was nearly gone.

"Must n't? I will!" I declared. "Nothing can stop me now!" and I pressed close to read her shadowy face.

"I can," she said more to herself than to me, "and I will!"—she kept retreating quickly from me—"I don't want you to. I came to say good-by."

"Good-by? What nonsense!" I cried, as with a bound I overtook her. "I have

I came to say good-by

found you now at last—the real you." And I loomed high before her in the fog, blocking her escape, I thought.

But beside her branched another path I could not see. Down this she darted. An intervening bush concealed her as I quickly turned to follow. I heard her footsteps. I rushed toward the sound. The sound ceased—suddenly. There was utter stillness. I could see nothing. Then like a whisper in my ear, "Good-by, Nick," I heard—almost beside me. She had stepped off the asphalt path. She was out there upon the soundless grass somewhere. I pressed through the dense fog toward the voice. My outstretched hands found only mist. I spoke her name. I knew that she was near me. She kept silent. I called louder. "Answer me, Hulda!"

No answer came.

Presently, far below me, I heard a

light step cross the walk. I ran to the spot. She was gone.

Then silence, and the fog, and after that black darkness.

## XXXIV

WHEN I reached the club, not many minutes later, the first man I saw was Torresdale, standing calmly before the broad hall fireplace, legs apart, hands in pockets, talking glibly to a group of men I do not know about English politics.

Hating myself for appealing to the man I hated and feared above all men, but who alone might tell me what I now must know, I drew near him. "Just a moment," I said, apologizing for the interruption, "it is important," and led him apart.

"Oh, is that all you want to know?" he said, smiling quizzically at my discomfiture. "I thought from the way you

began that you had been caught in this crazy market, and were going to strike me for a loan. Did you ever see such a market?"

"Do you, or do you not know what she is doing, where she is staying?" I asked, hanging upon his answer, wishing to ask a thousand other questions.

"Naturally," he replied easily. "Why did n't you ask me long ago? You seem to have avoided me lately, Nick. In fact, I thought you had lost all interest in us."

How I hated him for that "us," wondering what it meant, and knowing the futility of inquiring. "Then you 'll tell me where I can find her?"

"Why not?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said, biting my lips, "but will you?"

"No," he replied, with a sickening pause; "I 'll do better: I 'll take you to see her, this very evening. Sorry I can't

dine with you; I have sent up my order with this gang," he said, turning toward the group he had left to speak with me. "Don't eat a big dinner, Nick; we 'll start early. Oh, by the way, old chap"—he put his hand on my shoulder—"interesting mix-up out at Red Hill, I understand."

"I assumed that you understood it," I replied, moving out of reach of his arm.

"Not entirely. But I have done what I could to restore order."

"Have you?" said I, moving farther away; "you were n't successful."

"It 'll come out all right in the end, my boy, it 'll come out all right in the end," he called after me. So, laughing and saying: "Until after dinner then," he turned toward his friends and stepped lightly into the conversation again as if my interruption had not occurred, as if I did not enter his existence.

I dined with a classmate who is now a clergyman and with whom I forgot to converse, keeping my eye on the time, and then was allowed to wait many minutes by Torresdale who, when he joined me in the hall, was profuse in his apologies for forgetting. Now in apparent haste he ordered a cab and scribbling an address upon the club stables' card, handed it to the man at the door as if in too much of a hurry to tell me our destination.

"Mind telling me where you 're taking me?" I asked as he jumped in beside me.

"You said you wanted to see the Duchess, did n't you?"

I made no reply.

"I am taking you to see the Duchess."

I did not fancy his debonair jocularity as if nothing had happened. "Mind making another matter equally clear?" I asked.

He laughed indulgently at my sarcasm. "Fire away," he said.

"Did you ever think I really cared for Constance Ogden?" It seemed necessary to put it thus brutally.

"I did n't think much about it. Hulda and every one else seemed to think so—your aunt said so. Oh, I saw your aunt out there the other day. She 's all in a panic over you; had received a cold little note from Constance breaking an engagement for next week—because you are to be one of your aunt's party. Constance used her mother's health as a pretext. So palpably a pretext that, 'if it 'll do for them, it 'll do for me,' says your aunt to herself—she has humor, Nick—and over she came on the run to inquire after 'dear Maggie's' health. She 's a great piece of work. She had guessed the real trouble in a minute. When she arrived she found Mrs. Ogden in such a

healthy rage that she forgot even to mention her regular symptoms—which must indeed have alarmed your aunt. They got right down to business. Oh, she 's a piece of work. Wish I had an aunt like that—she 'd make a man of me."

I waited until he finished, then I repeated: "Did you ever think I really cared for Constance?"

"I thought you ought to. It would have been more in character."

"You mean you wanted me to."

"Well, for that matter, what did you want me to do, eh?"

"Only to play the game fairly."

His face suddenly turned toward me. I could not see its expression in the dim light, but his tone showed resentment. "Of course you know I would n't stand that from most fellows. Wait till the end of the game before you make such insinuations."

The cab rumbled along in silence for a moment. Then he went on again, as if unruffled: "Yes, it 's a grand old mix-up. I would n't have missed it for the world—all the elements of real comedy. Of course I was n't on the inside, but a good deal percolated through—could n't help doing so. Why, the very atmosphere of the place reeked with it. Even the men-servants and the maid-servants are on, and for all I know the oxes and the asses too. Are n't a pack of women amusing when once they turn on a person they have liked?" He paused a moment. "By the way, Nick, they tried to make me think that *you*, too, had been rather horrible—not only to them, I mean, but to me. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I have n't been thinking much about you, I 'm afraid," I muttered. "Miss Rutherford is dependent on her own re-

sources, I understand. How is she to support herself? Do you happen to know?"

"I told them there was nothing in their amusing charges. I 've got all that 's coming to me," he chuckled, "I 'm not worrying."

"Has she secured another position as governess or something?"

"Dear, no! She can't. The Ogdens have seen to that. As your wonderful aunt says, 'she is decorative but dangerous'—no one wants governesses who will flirt with one's guests. Here we are."

The cab drew up before an old-fashioned high-stooped house, exceedingly shabby. It was on a side street, not far from Broadway. Torresdale led me to the basement entrance. From behind a cage-like door an old man arose, bristling, then said, "Good evening, Mr. Torres-

dale," quite respectfully, "you 're late, sir."

Wondering, I followed my companion. Near the entrance hung a sort of bulletin-board. Upon it I saw a list of names and numbers. We passed through a dingy hall, musty smelling, then turned to the left through an opening in a thick wall, evidently cut through the side of the house, and then into a darker passage and up a step or two. I saw brighter lights beyond and heard suppressed voices, one of them angry. They echoed oddly. It was a bleak, barn-like place, quite spacious, with the raw, bare bricks of the wall behind us, and in front, platforms, scaffolding, and dirty canvas-covered frames with numbers daubed on them. "Old-style house," said Torresdale. "See what a high paint-loft." I looked up and saw ropes and pulleys reaching far overhead into the darkness. "I once

had a production of my own here," he said. Just then I saw a woman scurrying past, dressed in an extravagant costume, and realizing that I was behind the scenes in a theater, I thought of many things. Dust and disillusionment lay thick about me.

"A fine old stage"—Torresdale was still talking—"see how deep it is. They annexed that once respectable home we came through for dressing-rooms. That leaves plenty of off-stage space, you see. Many a famous old player has made his bow here—and many a poor one too, for that matter—dead and now forgotten. We 'd better go out in front; we 'll be in the way here presently. The grips have struck the first set and now they 're hustling up the one for the second act. Everything 's stiff and unwieldy at first. This is the dress rehearsal. *They* have to rehearse *their* parts as well as the players.

That 's why the stage-manager 's swearing so. To-morrow is the first night. They 'll be still more excited then. This production has been rushed through in a hurry."

I followed where he led, past men in shirt-sleeves sweating, and through a dirty iron door behind the boxes and out into the auditorium.

A handful of people there, mostly of the profession, it seemed, nearly all of them men, smoking. Their hats were on. Several of them nodded at Torresdale abstractedly. There was the feeling of a lull, a waiting expectancy. A group of men were standing down by the orchestra railing, leaning upon it discussing something earnestly. An elderly man was gesticulating excitedly before a young one who shook his head doggedly. "The old man is the producer. That young chap is the author," said Torres-

dale—"the one biting his nails, poor devil. They 're trying to bully him into taking one of their 'suggestions.' They are as bad as editors," he added with a smile, "and not so polite."

We took seats half-way down. "What is the name of this play?" I asked.

"It is n't a play: it 's a musical piece," he replied, "and it 's going to make a hit —a big hit."

"She 's not going to appear in that sort of thing?" I exclaimed.

"But this is a very nice, refined one," said Torresdale, laughing a little—at me, I suppose. "Of course, this is n't just the sort of beginning we wanted for her, but you know how it is, one has to take what one can get, you know. Many a famous actress has begun her climb toward the heaven of stars from this round of the ladder. Wait and see."

Was this one of his jokes? I did not

think I would see her here, but I waited.

I heard hammering behind the curtain, and the loud voice again, "Look out for those top-lights!" Finally the noises stopped. "Stand by!" called the voice, "stand by!"

The talking near us ceased. The house was darkened, the footlights were turned on, the orchestra began its work, and the curtain arose upon a rather beautiful sylvan dell, representing a court in fairyland, it seemed, with a chorus of fairy youths and maidens flitting about, who presently came down to the footlights and began singing.

"Look up, you need not worry," said Torresdale, not unkindly. "She 's not on in this number."

The elderly man I had noted before, the producer, raised his hand for quiet. The singing ceased, the orchestra stopped in the middle of a bar. Every one turned

toward him respectfully. "Would you mind beginning over again?" he asked in a kind, melodious voice; "and you, Margery, please be careful not to mask those up-stage with your wings—it 's all right, dear, we are n't used to them yet, you know." So they began over again.

"You see how considerate they are?" asked Torresdale, poking me. "Most misunderstood people in the world. To be sure, you can still find the martinet method employed by some producers, but more and more of them nowadays are discovering that it *pays* to be kind. Players are as sensitive as children, but they 'll work their heads off for you if you 're kind, kind and firm."

A fairy in diaphanous garments came on and waved a wand or did something. Others came on and some of them sang and some of them danced. I did not know just what was taking place.

"Some of these little things have tal-

ent," Torresdale resumed, critically; "a kind of talent you people down-town seldom appreciate, though you like to watch it. They are foolish, flighty children for the most part, and yet sometimes even one of these enjoys a certain sense of creation, gets an artistic satisfaction which you and your kind can never know or understand. For example, that eminently caressable-looking one there in baby blue to match her infantile smile, she does this sort of thing eight times a week for fifteen dollars per, and manages to keep a touring-car on her savings. Pity her if you must—and she will be pathetic enough some day—but don't mind if meanwhile she, too, sometimes feels, under that tinsel-covered corsage, a certain sense of superiority to your complacent smugness, your imprisoned respectability, which people like you think so fine and enviable."

"Oh, shut up!" I said, unable to con-

trol myself any longer. "Why did you bring me here?"

He turned and smiled at me. "Wait," he said.

There was a flare of music and then a burst of applause as three pretty, fluffy girls ran out dressed in very long trains with huge white picture hats. But she was none of these. From the other side three slender young men came mincing out, dressed in white flannel suits and straw hats. Some of the professional audience applauded their friends.

I felt Torresdale's eyes upon me, and once I glanced at him. He was smiling quizzically.

"I think I 'll go," I said; "you know she 's not here."

He put a restraining hand on my knee and just then, "The Duchess!" shouted the chorus. "Here comes the Duchess!" and as they pointed toward the back of

the stage the side of the enchanted hill opened, and I saw the Hulda I had lost a few hours ago in the mist.

Even in my dumb amazement I could not fail to note how radiant and wonderful she was in court robes with a coronet on her head; and, whether she liked the tinsel make-believe or hated it, she was playing the part well, in such a way that no one might guess what she felt beneath.

It gave me a strange, dreamlike effect of unreality to see her up there, and with it came that haunting sense of recognizing something experienced once before. I had felt the same thing the time I first discovered her a governess at Red Hill. There, too, she seemed to be playing a part and with this same easy grace, this same detached and sparkling interest in the things about her, this same undisturbed indifference to what I or all the

world might think of her. A moment before I feared that she might be marred and cheapened by appearing here; now I knew that her superb disdain could carry her through anything, with grace and dignity and half-smiling humor. How hopelessly I loved her! and how had I dared to tell her so?

Again I became aware of Torresdale gazing at me. "Yes, Nick, a pretty good entrance for a beginner," he whispered. "You 'd never guess that girl was scared to death — perhaps she is n't; I don't know. She never lets any one find out what she really feels. She 's such a thoroughbred. What a walk! What a presence! I wonder where she learned it."

There was no applause, because she was only an "extra" without a line to speak, to be unnamed upon the program, unknown even to this audience. But a hush of respectful attention had come

over the house. Her delicacy made an appeal even to those who did not appreciate nor desire delicacy.

Now she came quietly down the stage and took her place beside a gilded throne on the left, and others in turn were announced and hailed by the waiting chorus. "The Princess!" they shouted, and, finally, "The Queen, the Queen!" more ecstatically than ever, and this time all burst into loud huzzahs, as the star entered, bowing to the applauding little audience, and took her place swaggeringly upon the throne with the ladies of the court grouped about and the chorus dancing before her.

"Look at our Hulda!" whispered Torresdale enthusiastically. "See how still she stands. See how contained and reserved she looks, as if unaware of the most critical audience she will ever have, within a few yards of her. There! She

sees you—and she never even moved. I was not supposed to bring you here. I could n't resist it. She makes that poor queen look like—what she is in real life. No wonder Genevieve has begun to kick to the governor about this scene. She 'll make trouble for Hulda. Most actresses when they try 'high-life' parts think they must hold their chins in the air like that and snub everybody in sight. It 's ludicrous and rather pathetic the way they try to assume an air of haughty superiority. But look at the Duchess. It is n't merely because Hulda happens to have been presented at a real court that she is doing this so well. It 's because she does n't have to assume anything; she 's got it already. She 's *it*.' I tell you, Nick, before the week is out they 'll be flocking here to see our Duchess walk."

Again I felt his quizzical eyes upon me, but I made no comment.

"The word will go out along Broadway that there 's something new here, something new and different. She 'll be made; she 'll soon be famous; my prediction will come true. . . . Do you remember that evening on the club roof-garden? I said the time would come when we should boast of having known that governess."

And now my blood began to boil, as I thought of to-morrow with the public here to ogle her. For the moment I had forgotten this. The music and the lights, the glitter and the glamour—I had been dazzled. But now I realized what it would mean. This handful of spectators near me did not matter; they looked upon her with cool, professional eyes, critical, impersonal. But to-morrow! My hands clenched as I thought of certain ones who attended every first night. Her beauty and her fresh young

charm, her sparkling smile, her quiet poise—I knew how their eyes would fasten on my Hulda. It was not a pleasant thought to contemplate in any case: but for me who loved her and had so nearly won her not half a day ago, it was exquisite torture.

"Torry," I remarked as quietly as I could, "why have you let her do this sort of thing?"

"Why are most of them doing it, Nick? Why did you and I do a lot of unpleasant apprentice jobs when we began our trades? Did you think that because she happens to be good-looking and has played leading rôles in amateur comedy she could practise a difficult profession without learning it could jump upon the stage and grab the star's part out of her hands? You have heard tales of that sort. You probably believed them. They don't come true. She 'll

have to learn to act before she becomes an actress."

"She 'll not learn it here," I answered. "This is no play—this is a parade."

"Then why don't you get her a part in a real play?" he asked.

I had no answer.

"It 's too late in the season, Nick," he said. "No new plays are being produced just now. This is the best we could get for her to start with. Could hardly have got this, even with her looks and my pull, if I had n't written in the bit for her myself. The playwright is a friend of mine. I thought you 'd like the name of the part—a delicate compliment to you."

"Torry, you ought n't to let her do it."

"Nick, you ought n't to make her do it."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well Nick, it was n't my fault she

lost her job at Red Hill." He indicated the stage and, "You 're responsible for her being up there," he said. . . . "That side-piece is too far on stage. I 'll be back in a moment." As he rose he leaned over me. "My boy," he said, still smiling, but I thought more kindly, "on the whole you are taking it rather well. Abstractly it is hard, of course, for me to understand your extreme view, but sitting beside you I find I can almost sympathize with it. I get an inkling of it every now and then. It 's very quaint." Then he strolled down to speak to some one.

While he was busy with the others I stole in behind the scenes, unnoticed, and waited until she left the stage, relaxing slightly from her make-believe, I thought, as she drew nigh, walking slowly. She did not see me as I waited there in silence, a little dizzy at the

thought that she was coming toward me and that now at last we were to meet each other face to face again, she who had vanished in the mist and I who loved her. She came so near that by the strong light behind me I could see the paint upon her tender cheeks, the thick particles of black clinging to her wondrous lashes. Without a start or any sign to show that I had been discovered she turned a little to the left and disappeared behind a bit of scenery. Perhaps she had not seen me waiting in the shadow.

I sought the ancient doorkeeper, bribed him, and sent her word that I was there to see her upon a matter of importance. I stayed in the deserted hallway. Word came back that she was very sorry not to see me, and please not to wait.

Then I hurried out, for I knew that the second of the two acts was nearly fin-

ished, to a hotel around the corner, and scrawled this line: "Please let me see you, if only for a moment. It is so important." This I sent sealed to her dressing-room. My answer came back swiftly, and was brief: "Impossible." It was written hurriedly in her hand on my envelop, apparently with the thick black pencil used for shading her eyes. The envelop was empty.

So I waited outside the stage-door. I waited long.

"What are they doing in there all this time?" I asked the doorkeeper.

"Running through the second act again," he said, and grinned at me impudently. A man pacing up and down before the stage-entrance was not to him an unfamiliar sight. And as I realized this, the disquieting thoughts came flooding over me afresh. I could no longer keep them from me when I tried.

And I was responsible for her being here. . . .

Waiting is such nervous work.

. . . . .

She was the last to come out from the dressing-rooms and hang her key beside the bulletin-board.

She came alone and wore once more the long blue rain-coat of our misty afternoon. She seemed such a plucky girl, so quietly confident and oh, so innocently unconscious of what lay before her on the morrow. I, waiting in the shadow, could hardly wait for her to reach me.

"Hulda!" I burst out in an excited whisper, "you must n't do this! It 's out of the question! This place—these people—and to-morrow! You of all women!" I was overwrought by the day's emotions, and did not realize how this would affect a girl of spirit.

I was dimly aware that I had startled her, but she was calm when she answered: "You need not come to-morrow."

"Nor you, Hulda. Hulda! will you marry me?"

She was not startled now, nor was she any longer calm. She seemed furious. "Thanks for your generosity," she said: "I could not dream of imposing upon it," and turned toward the open stage-entrance again as if expecting some one.

It made me frantic. "Hulda! stop! What does all this mean? At least, I have a right to understand you, a right to some sort of explanation. Why are you doing this thing? And why, Hulda, why did you look for me to-day?"

"To say good-by. Perhaps you did not hear me. I 'm ready, Torry," she called. He approached, talking briskly with two other men.

"Good-night, old chap," said Torres-

dale to me as if nothing had happened. I stood aside to let them pass. Her long blue rain-coat brushed my arm.

# XXXV

It must have been well on toward morning when I ended my night's tramping at Torresdale's rooms. I now was desperate.

He was sitting in the dark before an open fire, but seemed glad to welcome me. He said he had been thinking about me, and turned on the lights.

"Torry," I began at once, "for God's sake, help me, will you? You say I got her into this hole; won't you help me get her out—before to-morrow night? She does not realize what she 's doing—but *you* surely realize!"

He looked up and laughed as I began, but checked himself. "I beg your pardon, Nick," he said, "but you look so tragic. You sound as if you 'd gone to

a Bowery joint from a rescue mission. You are taking it too seriously. You are almost hysterical. Nick, upon my word, I don't believe you ever were in love before; a great big boy like you!"

I turned away. I was in no mood for this sort of thing.

"Wait," he said. "Sit down, Nick."

"Torry," I resumed, for I could not afford to lose my temper now; too much was at stake; "I don't know what your real attitude toward her is"—I paused for a reply; none came except his quizzical, smiling scrutiny—"nor hers toward you; but you seem to have some influence over her. I have not. She does n't confide in me. But you know what *my* attitude toward her is. Could we work together on this thing? Will you help me prevent her going on with it?" If he had any regard for her, I thought, he must surely feel as I did.

"The lingering taint of Puritanism that has wrought such havoc in all our Anglo-Saxon art!" he laughed, "the ignorant prejudice against the stage, which keeps it down—down, so they can keep on condemning it, I suppose. So you want to cut short her artistic career?" he asked, "just at its promising inception. What a pity!"

"Artistic rot," I answered. "Think of the crowd there to-morrow night, think of their looks, their comments—guess the rest."

"Comments? I heard nothing but the most flattering comments. I heard her pronounced a queen this evening—and so she is, though you used to be content to let it go at a duchess, I believe. The staring will be no worse than at real queens at their coronations. I saw a coronation once; the personal comments were n't half so flattering. A cat may

Sit down, Nick

look at a king; why not a man at a queen? You must be jealous."

"Oh, shut up," I said, "you know what I mean. I 'm not working for myself in this. I simply can't stand her being on the stage."

"Well, why don't you marry the girl?" he asked. "That 's the usual way."

I did not like his tone. "No man is fit to marry her," I returned reverently.

"That 's what they always say," he mused, "and yet did you ever know any of 'em to let a little thing like that stand in the way? You 'll probably marry her. I 'll bet you two to one you marry her." Again he gave me his eager scrutiny.

I arose to go. "Then if you won't help me I must try it alone—somehow," I sighed; "I don't know just how."

"Nick," he said, detaining me, "it

does n't seem to occur to you that this is asking a lot of me. You see, I have put her on the stage; it 's to my interest to keep her there. She may make me famous as well as herself. Even if I 'm never lucky enough to star her in a piece of my own, at least I can always boast that I gave her her start. 'Hulda Rutherford? oh, yes, I discovered her, I knew her when she was only a governess'—and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Torry, if you have the slightest real regard for Miss Rutherford—" I began.

"To-night," he went on, ignoring my interruption, "at the close of the rehearsal they offered her a permanent engagement. That 's why we were so late in getting out. Oh, you 're not the only one she impressed to-night. It 's seldom they take the extra people so seriously. They wanted her to sign at once—before the other managers see her to-morrow night and snap her up, you understand?"

"And I suppose you made her do it?"

He smiled oddly. "No, I advised her to wait."

"In order to get a more advantageous offer?" I asked, seeing my hopes fade.

"Nick," he said, changing his tone abruptly to a frank friendliness, "in a way you 're right about this thing. Perhaps you have influenced me. She 's too fine for what she 's doing. Of course the stage is not so naughty as you and your sort prefer to think, and in any case she can take care of herself. Think of her derisive smile! But it will be an awful nuisance for her. It 's such a bother to be beautiful; and yet, what woman would not give all she has for that disquieting possession. But think of our Hulda as a public beauty! It will never do. It will spoil the very quality we adore about her most—I was especially impressed with that to-night—her delicate elusiveness, her arrogant aloofness.

No, Nick, she was not made to be a 'servant of the public.' It 's not her *metier*."

I knew he enjoyed watching me shudder, but I felt now as though he, too, were capable of shuddering, and I thought better of him than I had in months.

"And yet," he said, "there 's this stupid, humdrum, human habit of eating and sleeping. Even she can not break herself of that. What would you say to something of this sort, for earning a quiet living in the surroundings she 's accustomed to?" He tossed me a note from the table.

It was from Mrs. H. Harrison Wells, a young matron rather great in her world, with whose name I dimly recalled hearing Torresdale's linked in idle gossip. She said that she would be delighted to have Miss Rutherford fill the place left

vacant by the marriage of her late secretary. "It means helping entertain her guests," he said. "Mrs. Wells is rather lazy."

"Thank God," I said—too grateful to be jealous. Evidently Torry had written to Mrs. Wells some time ago. Perhaps he had felt as I did all along. "When did this arrive?" I asked.

"Only this evening, at dinner."

"You showed it to her?"

"On the way home—that 's why I bluffed off the governor until I could see her alone. Nick, she refused Mrs. Wells's offer."

"Refused it! Why?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

We looked at each other. I searched his calm, impenetrable eyes. I wondered what he knew and was holding back.

"Torry," I said, "what does it mean?

Can that girl be so fascinated by all that tinsel-tawdry make-believe?"

He laughed at my phrase. "She hates the tinsel-tawdry make-believe."

"Then why, in the name of reason, did she refuse this offer?"

Again he shrugged. "Nick," he said, "I know just enough about women to know that I know nothing."

Then he seemed anxious to get at his work, which he said was a love story.

## XXXVI

WILD plans scudded through my mind in sleep, and wilder ones at each fitful awakening. Despise and hate me as she would, I could not let her do the thing she chose to do, since now there was a fair alternative. I no longer cared (or thought I did n't) how she regarded me; her future was more important to me than my own. She had arrived at a crucial parting of the ways, and I made up my mind she should not take the way she blindly had selected.

If necessary I would meet and intercept her at the door—so I pictured it—and carry her away by force, and so spoil her chances. My will was now opposed to hers, and mine would prove the master—so I thought.

Indeed, when day and clearer vision came, this wild intention hardened into fixed resolve, for no milder plan seemed possible. She had not told me where she lived. Torresdale, who knew, declined to tell me. He said (whether truthfully or not) that she had made him promise not to. At the theater they refused to give me her address. None of her friends had even seen her.

Meanwhile there was a day's work to worry through.

As twilight approached the lover in me —for I could not kill my love for her, though knowing her I saw clearly now that what I meant to do would kill all that might be left of the kind regard she bore me—the lover led my footsteps to the pleasant paths in our beloved Park where but a day ago my hopes had reached their height, and where I lost her when so nearly won.

Here was the reservoir where we walked in silence through the mist, and here the little bridge where the reckless rider and my heart galloped hard in concert. And here was the open space among the trees where the world stood still when I told her that I loved her, and everything had told me she was mine except the mere words, and then I lost her. And here—

Here I found her now.

## XXXVII

As if the intervening hours had never been, and merely the fog had lifted, she was standing quite still and quite alone upon that very spot, with a thoughtful look upon her half-turned face.

She did not hear my swift approach for, just as she had used the soundless grass to slip away from me, it served my purpose now to come up close behind her, speaking her name.

I had surprised her. But she was far from glad as when I found her on the wet Avenue the day before. She flushed with displeasure and she bit her lip, and asked me what I wanted there, as though it were her private park, and I a poacher. But I was not abashed.

"I? Oh, *I* was merely looking for *you*," I replied, the cooler of the two; "and you?"

"I was looking for my path," she said hastily, explaining that she lived nearby. "It 's always so confusing here."

"So I found it yesterday," said I. "You *look* confused. Let me show you the right path," I added. "I am not confused to-day."

"I have found it now," she answered, and started off abruptly, I following closely.

"This is not the right way," I said, detaining her.

"I 'll take which one I please," she declared emphatically, "and I will go alone."

"You 're quite mistaken in both those matters," I answered. "You 'll take the one I say, and, as it happens, you 're not to go alone."

"Indeed?" she cried, indignant now, and turned off from the main path through a little copse, but she was not to escape me again. "No," I said, overtaking her easily, "not this time—stop!" and I stood before her with both arms outstretched, so that she had to stop, or else run into them. There was still a little light left in the Park, and not far away passed a few belated people bound for dinner.

"Don't make yourself ridiculous," she sneered, "they will see you."

"I know it, so take care," I answered. "Think how they would stare if you caused a scene—here in a public park!"

She stood still now and looked at me, defiant. I looked down at her. "You could n't stop me if I cared to go on," she said more lightly, as though temporizing.

I told her I was pleased that she did

not care to go on, but that I could easily stop her.

"Pooh!" she said, laughing now to show how calm she was. "How could you stop me?"

"Well, for one thing, you are only a girl. I could easily hold you in my arms, you know. I 'm so much stronger."

"Pooh!" she said again. "You! You would n't dare!" and turned to go the other way. I seized her sharply by the wrist. She gasped. "Don't be absurd," she breathed.

"Then don't go," I said, but did not release her hand. The people had passed on, their minds on dinner. We had that part of the Park to ourselves.

"What are you going to do with me?" she asked timidly. It was mock timidity, as if she still were master of us two, but she was not, for it was no longer as a suppliant lover that I stood before her

now. Not my interests but hers were in my mind—this made all the difference. I felt a confidence and dominance I had never known before in the presence of this woman. Also, I was quite aware that her hand was in my grasp and that it was rigid. Thus we two stood confronting each other in the fading light, each resolute, determined. She shot such glorious looks of scorn at me. They glanced off, harmless, and I searched her shadowy eyes until they turned away from mine.

"Do you wish to make me late?" she asked with grave dignity.

"Yes."

There was a little pause.

"Are you trying to humiliate me?"

"No. To save you from worse humiliation."

Her lip curled. Then, in an anxious tone: "It 's really time for me to go," she

said. "I have an obligation to meet. I have a sense of honor, even if you have not."

"Your part is unimportant. It can be cut. No one will miss it."

"Indeed!" she cried, with growing wrath.

"However, it does n't matter—you 're not going to that place again."

She laughed as if indulgent. "Oh, yes, I am," she said confidently.

"Oh, no, you 're not."

"I will!"

"You can't!"

Again we looked at each other, my grasp tightening a little on her wrist. "So that is all settled," I said. "Now, I have something else to say to you—"

"I do not wish to hear!" she flung back instantly.

"If you think that I mean to tell you that I care for you, you 're much mis-

taken. I 've done that once. Do you suppose I 'm the sort to repeat it? No. Before we part we are to understand each other clearly, for once, for all—even if it proves to be the last time we ever meet."

"I 'll have that to be thankful for, at least," she interjected half aloud.

"Last night I begged you to explain—"

"I 'll never explain!" she cried excitedly.

"I know it—that 's why I 'm going to do it."

"I don't care to hear your explanation."

"I know that too, but you 've got to. I know all about you now."

"You know nothing about me!"

"Everything! I can read you like a book. I know why you acted as you did when you discovered that I cared

for you. I know why you avoided me. I know why you turned to Torry for help. I know why you went on the stage. I know why you refused to leave it."

"You do not!" she cried, almost inarticulate with rage.

"But I do! The explanation is so simple that it 's strange I did not guess it from the start. I know why you are so angry with me now." She was struggling to be gone and I grasped her by the other hand and turned her toward me. "It 's because you love me! That 's why you are here—and caught!"

And oh, now, the look upon her face! Never before was such a sight for the eyes of man. Proud, scornful, superb—but trapped, dismayed, disarmed. I saw her summon all her virgin strength, and, like an angry Artemis discovered, she shot the bolt that should destroy me:

"I—*hate*—you!" she hurled, and her wondrous face in glorious wrath was but a little distance from my own. Oh, what terrific scorn was in her tones. But I was not terrified. I liked it.

"No," I cried, no longer pretending to be calm, "you—*love* me!"

"Oh, how I *hate* you!"

"It 's love. You love me—almost as much as I do you! Every flash of your burning, hating eyes tells me that you love me—every quiver of your lovely mouth—every tremor of your slender body. No, Hulda, it 's no use struggling—I shall never let you go. You love me! That 's why you tormented me at Red Hill—that 's why you ran away at last—thinking you had been unfair to some one else. That 's why you were so furious at my disapproval of the stage—that 's why you took this work you hated—to punish yourself and hide

from me, thinking I would not care to follow there—believing it would cure me—yet hoping all the time it would n't—and fearing all the time it might. Ah, Hulda! that 's why you came looking for me yesterday—because you could n't help it, Hulda—you could n't keep away, you lovely, lovely thing! Why, you love me so that you would even give me up!—so I might have what you can't bring—so romantically you love me—that 's why you came here now—to view once more the scene of sacrifice—here where love has brought us both to find each other when we foreswore love. Oh, Hulda, Hulda, you 're not a worldly duchess—you 're a glorious girl in love with me! Say it, Hulda, for you 're caught, and I shall never, never let you go." My arms found her and held her fast.

Still striving to be free of me, but

glorying in her unsuccess. "Oh," she sobbed, "can't you see how miserable you 're making me?"

"No," I cried, "only how happy you are—that 's why you cry. Look at me and deny it, if you can—deny it, if you dare!"

Bravely she raised her dewy eyes to gaze me down. She looked, she did not dare! Her eyes fluttered and fell. Her head drooped like a drenched rose.

For a moment her cool hands held my eager face in check, her eyes sounding my soul, then, "Oh, Nick, Nick!" she cried, sheer gladness breaking through her voice, as, surrendering to the happiness that was hers and mine, she gave herself to me at last.

. . . . .

At the moment of her sweet surrender, there in the gathering dusk, I only knew

the joy of what I had won, not the full value of it. This came a little later when thought returned, and we looked at each other with new eyes, wondering how such things could be granted mere mortals.

But now I know. And what am I that she should love me so! How can I hope to earn what I have won. I can only gaze and wonder and be glad.

. . . . .

We had left the blessed Park—when, where, or how, I do not know—and presently we found ourselves floating down the also blessed Avenue.

"Look at the time!" she said. "You have made me miss my dinner, Nick."

"You must have your dinner," I said, and thought rapidly. "We must be married at once."

She gasped a little, but smiled bravely. "Why at once?" she asked quite casually.

"Think how much time we have wasted apart already; and then, we can have dinner together."

She thought this over a while. Suddenly she cried, "Oh, here comes Torry to take me to the theater - there, in the hansom, under the light. Dear old Torry."

"Why 'dear'?"

"So was the beggar."

"For the same reason?"

"Only, Torry never begged. You did it for him, Nick—oh, so awkwardly! So awkwardly that sometimes you seemed very attractive."

"Let 's turn the corner," I said, not wanting to see Torresdale just now.

"No, he sees us. He sees everything. He admires you so, Nick. He 's a good friend of yours—you don't know how good a friend."

"He has peculiar ways of showing it."

"He does n't show it, he hides it. He thinks he 's a cynic—he 's a dear."

Torry, drawing up at the curb, was now saluting. "Why, Nick! Are *you* taking her to the theater? I 'm shocked!"

"He 's thinking of taking me to dinner!" laughed Hulda, perfectly poised. "Is n't he daring?"

"Why, we 're just going to get married," I remarked in a daze.

"Married?" repeated Torresdale, and burst out laughing.

"But he would n't take me to dinner otherwise," said Hulda, now crimson.

"Where does one get married?" I inquired, trying hard to look practical.

Torry laughed again. "One? I never tried it, but I know it takes two—two and a best man and a carriage. Good! I can be your best man after all, Nick! What did I tell you? And here! this cab will do for the carriage." He

jumped out beside us. "Get in, get in, both of you. I 'll go and telephone to Harrison—ah, so that 's why you dined with him last evening, Nick,—and I 'll telephone to Amy, Hulda—and to the theater, too—I 'll telephone to everybody—then I 'll jump on a car and beat you down there. Oh, I 'm always such a bully best man. Nick, did n't I tell you I 'd make a better best man than a bridegroom? Get in, I tell you. I 'm running this part of it—get in!"

There was no resisting him. I helped Hulda in and turned to him. "Torry, you—you—are all right," I said, wanting to say more, not knowing how.

"Oh, I 've had my fun out of it. I like to see the wheels go round. I told you it would come out all right in the end. But if I had n't shuffled the cards—well, let it go at that. Jump in beside her, man. The carriage waits—also the bride."

I clasped his hand and then sprang in.

"By the by," he said, leaning toward us at the open doors of the cab, "what are your prospects in life, you two—had you thought of that?" He glanced across Fifth Avenue where stand the houses of the mighty rich.

"Certainly," I answered confidently, "I have a thousand in the bank. That 's enough."

"Oh, beautiful!" he shouted, laughing, "a thousand dollars! Think of it! In this day and generation! And in this city of all cities—on this street! Well, God bless you."

And then as he slammed the door we heard him quote:

"God gave them youth,
God gave them love,
And even God can give no more."

FINIS